
Madan no Ou to Vanadis Volume 09

These are the novel illustrations that were included in
Madan no Ou to Vanadis volume 9

魔王と弾の戦姫

ヴァナディース

川口士

Illustration 片桐雛太

キャラクター原案 よし☆ヲ



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9

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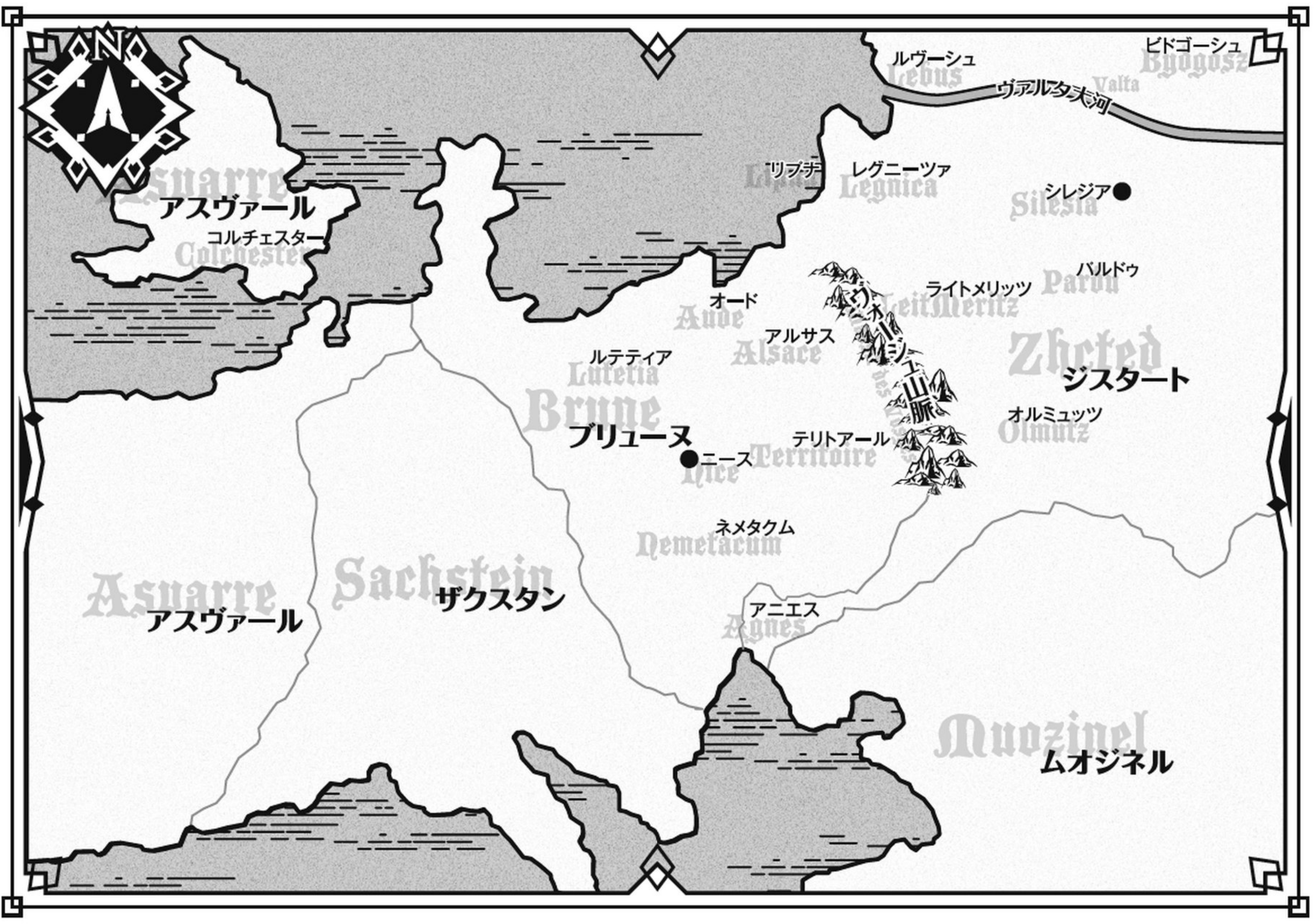
✦ Lim ✦
リム

✦ Elen ✦
エレン

✦ Tiffa ✦
ティッタ

✦ Tigre ✦
ティグル





＊登場人物紹介＊

＊ティグルヴルムド＝ヴォルン＊

本編の主人公。十七歳。愛称はティグル。
ブリュース王国の伯爵だが、現在は客将
としてジスタート王国のライトメリッツ
に身を置いている。



＊エレオノーラ＝ヴィルターリア＊

七戦姫のひとり。十七歳。愛称はエレン。
ジスタート王国の南西にあるライトメリ
ッツを治めている。竜具は長剣の“銀閃”
アリファール。

＊リムアリーシャ＊

エレンの副官で、昔からの親友でもある。
二十歳。愛称はリム。



＊ティッタ＊

ティグルに仕える侍女。十六歳。現在は
ライトメリッツに身を置いている。

✿ リュドミラ＝ルリエ ✿

七戦姫のひとり。十七歳。愛称はミラ。ジスタート王国の南にあるオルミュッツを治めている。竜具は槍の“凍漣”ラヴィアス。エレンとは犬猿の仲。

✿ ソフィーヤ＝オベルタス ✿

七戦姫のひとり。二十一歳。愛称はソフィー。ジスタート王国の南東にあるポリーシャを治めている。竜具は錫杖の“光華”ザート。外交に長ける。

✿ アレクサンドラ＝アルシャーヴィン ✿

七戦姫のひとりだった。オルシーナ海戦の後、病で命を落とす。愛称はサーシャ。竜具は双剣の“煌炎”バルグレン。

✿ エリザヴェータ＝フォミナ ✿

七戦姫のひとり。十八歳。ジスタート王国の北西にあるルヴァーシュを治めている。竜具は鞭の“雷渦”ヴァリツァイフ。『異彩虹瞳』の持ち主。

✿ オルガ＝タム ✿

七戦姫のひとり。十四歳。ジスタート王国の東にあるプレストを治めている。竜具は斧の“羅轟”ムマ。

✿ ヴァレンティナ＝グリンカ＝エステス ✿

七戦姫のひとり。二十二歳。ジスタート王国の北東にあるオステローデを治めている。竜具は大鎌の“虚影”エザンディス。

✿ レギン ✿

ブリュース王国の王女。十六歳。亡き父に代わり、ブリュース王国を治めている。ティグルを慕っている。

✿ マスハス＝ローダント ✿

ブリュース王国の伯爵。ティグルの父ウルスの親友で、彼の死後、ティグルの世話を何くれとなく焼いている。

✿ ルーリック ✿

ライトメリッツの若き騎士。弓の扱いに長ける。禿頭。

✿ ユージェン＝シェヴァーリン ✿

ジスタート王国のバルドウを治める伯爵。四十四歳。王位継承順位第八位。エレンやリムと親しい。

✿ イルダー＝クルーティス ✿

ジスタート王国のビドゴーシュを治める公爵。三十四歳。王位継承順位第七位。戦姫の中ではエリザヴェータやヴァレンティナと交流がある。

✿ ヴィクトール ✿

ジスタート国王。

✿ バートラン ✿

ティグルの側仕えだった。聖窟宮で、ティグルを助けて命を落とす。

Chapter 1 – Past and Bonds

The Zchted kingdom holds seven dukedoms within its borders.

One among them, Olmutz was in the southern part of Zchted.

Even in Zchted called the “country of snow and forest” and with long winters compared to other countries. The south had a lot of warm regions, but Olmutz with its many hills and mountains was an exception. The coldness of the wind blowing down from the mountains covered with snow was to the extent that even the beasts of the field ruffled their fur and crouched.

The lord of that Olmutz was called Ludmira Lurie. She was currently 17 years old and one of the proud Vanadis of Zchted. With the nicknames of Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave and the Danseuse of the Spear, she was called Mira by those close to her.

It was a day of winter when severe coldness continued that she received a messenger of LeitMeritz.

“It was hard to reach here at this time, right?”

To the messenger who was probably twice her age, Mira spoke words of thanks and offered him a chair.

There was a big brick fireplace in the drawing room where the messenger was led into, and the brightly blazing fire within was warming the indoor air. On the floor, a carpet woven with high quality wool was laid out. What was decorated on the walls was a tapestry vividly depicting the situation of harvest in autumn.

With her blue hair trimmed around her shoulders, Mira wrapped her small body in blue-dyed silk clothes. While having lovely features, in her behavior, there was a clear dignity as a person standing above others. The Frozen Wave Lavias which was her Dragonic Tool was put within her reach.

When the messenger bowed, he sat on the chair after putting the bag he was holding in his hand on the floor with prudent hands.

The room was not so bright. This was because there was no other light than the fire of the candlestick put on the table and the flame of the fireplace. The windows were shut with thick curtains so as to keep the heat

within. That said, since the day was already sinking outside, there would be not that much meaning even if one could see through the windows.

Taking the iron kettle filled with hot water that was in the desk, Mira brewed black^{Chai} tea for two people. One was the messenger's portion.

Something like this was originally the duty of a servant or maid. However, she decided to brew tea personally for people whom she judged it was proper to do so.

A white porcelain cup in which steam rose was softly put before the messenger. Strawberry jam was served in a small dish next to the cup.

“I gratefully accept it.”

While wiping sweat which floated all over his face due to the indoor warmth and tension, the messenger was thankful and raised the cup. After drinking a mouthful, he put a little jam in and mixed.

“I thank you for having made time for me while you are busy. By the way, while coming here, I heard that the Muozinel forces which were along the southern border withdrew...”

“It’s true. My subordinates confirmed it too.”

While tickling her chin with the steam rising from her tea, Mira answered with a disappointed voice.

“They just stayed at the border for one month. Even skirmishes didn’t occur. Not only with me, but also other nobles. Please tell your Lord such.”

Your lord. In other words, it was the Vanadis Eleanora Viltaria of LeitMeritz. The messenger put the white porcelain cup on the table and expressed words of thanks

.

While slowly savoring the tea, Mira waited for the messenger’s words. He would not come all the way here within the raging cold wind just to ask about the Muozinel troops. She was bothered by the bag at his feet. The contents should have been checked by the servant, so it was nothing dangerous.

The messenger stared at Mira with a serious expression and opened his mouth.

“It is because I would like to talk about Earl Tigrevurmud Vorn who sojourned at our LeitMeritz, that I requested an audience with Vanadis-sama today.”

“Tigre...vurmud?”

Mira’s blue eyes were colored with surprise. As she began speaking his nickname “Tigre”, she promptly covered it by adding “vurmud”. She was bearing good will (kindness) towards Tigre as Vanadis as well as a young girl.

If that youth was in a predicament, Mira would probably help him out as much as possible. She could not speak of it though, since there was her position as Vanadis.

“Is there something up with him?”

Mira asked with a calm outward appearance. But, even that appearance was gradually torn off and fell while she was hearing the messenger’s story. Despite noticing the change of her expression, the messenger did not stop talking.

Around the end of summer, Tigre received a request of the Zhted King Victor and proceeded to the Asvarre Kingdom in the west, across the sea.

At that time in Asvarre, two princes and one princess were fighting over the throne, and Zhted decided to cooperate with one of them, Prince Germaine. Tigre went to Prince Germaine as a messenger.

Afterwards, Germaine lost his life within various confusions; Tigre cooperated with a young General called Tallard Graham, and it was Princess Guinevere who won the civil war. Guinevere wished for a friendship with Zhted, and Tigre was able to accomplish his duty as result.

It was afterwards that a problem occurred.

During the return to Zhted, The ship which Tigre was boarding was attacked by someone.

“According to the story of the Vanadis Sophia Obertas-sama who was boarding the same ship, it seems that what attacked them was a BadvaBadvasea dragon as big as the ship.”

The sea ^{Badva}dragon destroyed the ship and many people boarding it were thrown out in the night sea.

It's said that Tigre's figure was among them.

"Sophia-sama said that they desperately searched for Earl Vorn, but they were not able to find his body in the end."

"—I see"

Mira muttered only that, and put the white porcelain cup on the table. Her hand faintly trembled and it made a louder sound than expected.

Diverting his eyes from the blue-haired Vanadis, the messenger carefully lifted the bag which was at his feet. Within, he took out something wrapped in a silk cloth and set it up on the table.

As he removed the silk cloth, small, porcelain bottles came in sight. There were four. They had a cylindrical shape, and the form and color of the lids of each bottle were different. Staring at the bottles, the messenger said in a businesslike tone.

“It seems to be something that Earl Vorn bought in Asvarre. A present to Vanadis-sama.”

“To me...?”

Mira took one of the bottles and opened the lid. A unique fragrance which made one’s heart settled down tickled her nostrils. She immediately understood what it was. It was black tea.

“I gratefully accept it.”

Mira revealed a smile, but the messenger did not raise his gaze as he was still staring at the table. The blue-haired Vanadis did not blame him and changed the topic.

“By the way, do you know what His Majesty the King said regarding Lord Tigrevurmud?”

“No. I do not know.”

---I wonder what he intends to do.

Mira was inwardly puzzled. Such an incident could not be covered forever. Though weakened due to the previous civil war, Brune would not remain silent.

---There will definitely be someone who has to take responsibility. I don't think that the fault will be pushed onto Eleonora though.

Afterwards, as she asked some things about Zchted's situation and the messenger answered again, Mira called the chamberlain. She told him to guide the messenger to a guest room. When the messenger stood up and politely expressed words of thanks, he left the drawing room.

Now alone in the room, Mira stared at the bottles lined on the table. She took one in her hand and tightly held it in her arms.

"I don't think that you're dead. —But"

A mutter mixed with indignation and sadness leaked out from her trembling lips. If she came out of this drawing room, she had to behave as Ludmira Lurie who governed Olmutz. In this little time when she was alone, she spat out all her feelings.

“If it’s a souvenir, bring it by yourself. Idiot...”

After that, Mira thought about the Vanadis who was in the far away LeitMeritz.

Eleanora Viltaria. She probably had bitter feelings like (her) or maybe more than her.

Only the sound of wood popping within the fireplace resounded in the drawing room.

From the white cloudy sky, snowflakes soundlessly fluttered down.

They immediately melted and disappeared when they touched the ground; and soldiers sighed with a gloomy mood. The snow made the wind colder and froze their breath. Furthermore, they had to camp out here.

Exchanging idle chats between fellow soldiers while rubbing their hands together, and praying to the gods so

that the snow did not become severe was what they could do.

Radom's plains were in the south, slightly more than in the center of the Zighted Kingdom. On this ground which could not be said to be very wide, approximately 2000 soldiers had gathered.

About 1000 soldiers led by the Vanadis Eleonora Viltaria of LeitMeritz, and likewise about 1000 soldiers led by the Vanadis Elizavetta Fomina of Lebus. While also fluttering the battle flags of each dukedom besides the Black ^{Zirnitra} Dragon Flag, the soldiers were busy with the construction of camps.



A few days ago, Bydgauche Duke Ilda who was a great noble moved his troops to attack Pardu Earl Eugene for a certain reason.

Receiving a royal order to stop Ilda, the two Vanadis left their territory accompanied by their soldiers. And the two girls accomplished joining forces on Radom's plains for exchanging information.

But currently, the Vanadis were fiercely glaring at each other with pupils boiling with clear fighting spirit. Both of them had already unsheathed their Dragonic Tools, and it was literally a simmering atmosphere. The snow was flickering elegantly in the air as if not worried about the situation at all.

Eleanora was called Ellen by those close to her. Not only was she was an impressively beautiful 17-year-old girl whose silver hair streamed until her waist, but she was also a superior warrior and commander with the nicknames of Wind Princess of the Silver Flash and Danseuse of the Sword.^{Meltis}

Wrapping her body in a blue combat outfit, the red pupils of Ellen who set up her long sword were shining

with anger which seemed to blow off those who met them.

Elizavetta who was confronting Ellen was likewise the owner of breathtaking beauty.

However, what gave a strong impression to those who looked at her was not her vividly red hair or the purple dress which wrapped her rich body, but probably her pupils of different colors — LazirisLazirisRainbow Eyes.

The golden right eye which held high spirits and the blue left eye which hid an intense atmosphere were both reminiscent of lightning ^{Tourmaline[1]} crystals tinged with a modest lightning when holding heat.

A black whip was grasped in Elizavetta's hand. Just like the long sword was so for Ellen, this black whip was her Dragonic Tool. It was called Thunder Swirl.

There was quite a deal of fate between these two girls and it would be fair that their relationship was dangerous, but it was not as if they thoughtlessly fought against each other. Nevertheless, there was a reason as to

why they were hostile to each other like this. It was the existence of the youth on horseback standing beside Elizavetta.

With a medium build, he had features which left simplicity in his gallantry. He wore a padded undershirt of fur, carried a bow on his back and a quiver on the waist.

The youth was called Urz. It was probably not his real name because he had lost his memory.

About one month ago, Urz washed up on the coast in western Zchtet. He was saved by villagers who happened to pass by there, but when he woke up, he was not able to remember even one thing about himself.

The name Urz was the word which came out from the youth's mouth after the villagers repeatedly asked him whether there was something that he could remember.

Afterwards, there were ups and downs, and Elizavetta took a liking to him and made him her servant. Since she kept him by her side as a servant, it was something considerable.

Urz did not dislike Elizavetta either.

---There are some troubles, but she doesn't seem to be bad at bottom.

He had such an impression, and there was also the fact that he owed her for picking him, who was an aimless person. He intended to serve her until his memory returned.

Ellen called that Urz by a different name.

“Tigrevurmud Vorn. It's your real name” she said.

Even the bald head knight following her let his beautiful face flush and called for him in a voice carrying heat in no way inferior to that of his Lord. “Lord Tigrevurmud”.

As Urz was dumbfounded at this sudden thing, Elizavetta broke in as she was unable to bear it any longer. She cried that Urz was her subordinate, and that she did not know someone called Tigrevurmud Vorn.

And, that led to the current situation.

Both Ellen and Elizavetta, without taking a stance, were fixed straight at the eyes of each other. The long

sword Ellen possessed wore wind and the black whip Elizavetta set up was slightly tinged with lightning.

It looked like a clash was no longer avoidable. The two Vanadis adjusted their breathing, measured the distance between them and looked for an opening to strike a preemptive blow to the enemy before them.

But, there was someone who moved earlier than the two girls. It was Urz. With very natural movements, the youth broke in between the two.

“Tigre...”

The silver-haired Vanadis let her face, strained in tension, slightly relaxed. On the other hand, the red-haired Vanadis tried to raise her voice, but no words came out from her mouth and she strongly grasped the black whip with both hands.

When Urz bowed to Ellen, he told her in a calm, cold tone.

“I am sorry, but I cannot remember you.”

The snow which fell as if dancing looked as if it was frozen in time.

Ellen stared wide-eyed and was at a loss for words. She could not move even one finger. Even the bald headed knight was appalled and was not able to muster his voice. To both of them, the youth deeply bowed.

“But, please do not bully my master.”

Looking up, Urz turned the neck of his horse and returned next to Elizavetta.

Silence fell. Everyone's faces except for Urz, turned pale from shock. Even Elizavetta who was the youth's Lord.

It was the silver-haired Vanadis who broke the silence, which continued for about ten seconds, with a calm tone.

“—I'm sorry. Elizavetta.”

Sheathing her long sword, Ellen got down from the horse. She went towards the red-haired Vanadis and bowed her head very deeply so as not to lose to that of Urz a little while ago.

“It looks like I have jumped to the wrong conclusion. I apologize for having taken an impolite attitude.”

Ellen's hands were firmly clenched and her voice was shaking. Vast emotions which could burst at any time were confined within her heart.

Elizavetta was looking down at her head covered with silver hair in silence. It was not as if she had some kind of intention, it was just that words did not come out immediately. Both Urz's actions and Ellen's words were unexpected for her.

“...I'm glad that you understand Eleanora.”

Loosening the strength of her hand holding the black whip, she slowly spat out these words with a sigh. Even though it was cold to the extent that it snowed, sweat was running on her forehead.

Likewise, she rounded her black whip and put it back to her waist in order to show that she no longer had any intention to fight.

“I also don't intend to fight a useless battle. If you say so, then we shall call it on this issue.”

“Thank you Elizavetta.”

Ellen raised her face. There was neither anger nor grief floating on her face, and though she regained her presence of mind, vitality was lacking in her voice.

“By the way, it would be better to do a war council again after a half koku.”

“That’s fine. I have no objection either.”

Elizavetta nodded. There was still an awkward atmosphere drifting between the two girls. They needed time, even a little, in order to recover themselves.



“Then we shall prepare a camp here. After all, the day will also end after a half koku.”

“Shall our side bring a candlestick and a table?”

“We share; it will be troublesome if something is missing. Our side will prepare what is needed. —Then, after a half koku.”

Ellen straddled her horse and both girls bowed. The bald headed knight also turned his gaze towards Urz, seeming to want to say something, but when the silver-haired Vanadis turned her horse, he followed her.

In a place where the figure of LeitMeritz’s Lord became small, Elizavetta took a breath of relief. After that , she looked back towards Urz with a face like that of a child who somewhere became sullen.

“I wasn’t bullied.”

It was her first utterance to her servant in a slightly overbearing tone. After blinking several times, Urz gave an evasive reply saying “well”. This reaction should be

very disrespectful, but Elizavetta turned the neck of her horse without so much as blaming it in particular. Urz hurriedly followed her.

While advancing the horse to her army's camp, Elizavetta called Urz's name.

"I thank you for worrying about me. —Thank you."

Since she turned her back, Urz could not see her face. However, the Vanadis' voice which rode upon the winter's wind and reached him melted with joy and embarrassment.

When the two people reached camp, the snow stopped

.

In a place where they returned to LeitMeritz army's camp and entered the tent prepared for the supreme commander, the bald headed knight asserted to Ellen as he could no longer bear it.

"Vanadis-sama. Why did you do something like that? That youth is without a doubt Lord Tigrevurmud."

“Calm down, Rurick.”

Ellen rebuked in a quiet voice. While the knight called Rurick made a face showing that he could not understand, he prepared a chair for his Lord. It was a simple type which could be folded up when not used; he laid out a cushion on it.

“Good work.”

Giving words of appreciation, Ellen sat down on the chair.

When looking at the palm of her right hand, blood slightly blotted. They were traces into which fingernails dug in. If she did not clenched her fist so strongly, she would not have been able to restrain her feelings.

“Don’t bully her... huh. As expected, I managed to endure that. So in his eyes, it looked like I was bullying Elizavetta.”

“Those words of his were probably meant to calm the atmosphere.”

Putting a candlestick which lit fire near Ellen, Rurick said in order to comfort her. In the first place, he was not

a man skilled with speech. This was the utmost he could do. Although Ellen nodded, it was not as if she consented ; it looked like a reaction in consideration for her subordinate's concern.

A heavy atmosphere lurked.

It was then that wind blew in the closed tent.

A gentle breeze softly stroked Ellen's cheeks and flickered the flame of the candlestick. It was the long sword at her waist which raised this wind. This Dragonic Tool called Silver Flash was endowed with the power to control wind.

"Arifal..."

Ellen called her long sword's name with eyes wide opened and lightly laughed. Her red pupils were filled with shine, and she regained her vitality. She tapped the scabbard of the long sword, which cheered her, as thanks .

---That's right. It isn't the time to feel depressed.

Ellen who put herself together folded her arms and looked up at Rurick.

“Rurick. I also agree with you. I think that guy is Tigre.”

“Then, why...?”

“It’s simple. There is no proof.”

Ellen readily answered.

“We have no proof whatsoever that that guy who called himself Urz is really Tigre. To make matters worse, he came with memory loss.”

“But, Lord Tigrevurmud showed a reaction to our words. If we talk about various things, then surely...!”

“Even if we ask her to let us talk with him, Elizavetta will refuse. I don’t know what happened, but she is quite attached to Tigre. If we forcibly approach, a fight will occur this time for sure”

“Then, how about reporting it to the royal palace?”

As he came up with a bright idea, Rurick brightened his face. His slippery head in which the light of the candlestick reflected shone.

“Lord Tigrevurmud is a guest General whom we were entrusted with by the Brune Kingdom. Due to this incident, even the royal palace should be in tumult. If we report it there, won’t the situation change for the better?”

“It isn’t as if I didn’t think about it, but—”

Ellen spoke of an extremely ominous anticipation with a serious face.

“Supposing that he regained his memory, if by any chance... if by any chance, by our misapprehension, it’s really a different person, what would we do?”

Rurick could by no means laugh it off. Even when he tried to say something, his stomach was tightened due to anxiety and words did not come out.

Turning a sympathetic look towards the bald headed knight who wandered his gaze around, Ellen continued.

“I don’t know who said it, but he said that in this world, there are two or three humans with exactly the same face. It might just be a coincidence that the face and physique are quite similar. Even if he reacted to our

words, it might just be that one trivial word was caught on. We might have unconsciously held a strange expectation when we heard that he lost his memory.”

It was a story which one could hardly say with any finality that it was impossible. In the first place, Tigre fell in the sea of winter and at midnight at that, and was not found despite a strenuous search. It was unreasonable to think that he was alive.

“If that guy is another person, Elizavetta won’t surely forgive me this time. The relationship between LeitMeritz and Lebus will deteriorate to the limit. To the extent that we will have to take war into consideration. One mistake and it will also spread to Legnica.”

Between LeitMeritz in the southeastern part of Zhted and Lebus in the northeastern part, there was Legnica. It’s the land which was governed by the Vanadis Alexandra Alshavin.

She, who held the nickname of
Hidden Princess of the Luminous Flame^{Falpram}, lost her life due to illness and the Vanadis who would succeed her had

yet to appear. If it was caught up in a conflict in these circumstances, it would probably suffer immeasurable damages.

“Even the royal palace should be desperately thinking about how to interact with Brune by now. After all, a guest General, who was left in their charge, has died under the King’s request.”

Only for an instant, Ellen’s voice was tinged with anger. As she restrained the outburst of her feeling by a slight silent pause, she floated a sarcastic smile.

“Trying to take that guy from there and then he turns out to be a different person. If it’s a misapprehension, we won’t get away with that. And Brune will probably think that we tried to prepare an imposter to deceive them.”

Rurick groaned low. If it was the case, a war might happen between Zighted and Brune.

As Ellen changed her smile into a soft one, she said in a calm tone.

“There is not that much time until the war council. Let’s forget Tigre for now and concentrate on the matter of Duke Bydgauche. Even if I, who flared up at Elizavetta earlier than you, say it, it will lack persuasive power.”

“Such a thing is...”

“There is no such thing”, Rurick tried to say that, but he changed his thought and tightened his expression.

“Understood. I’m going outside to get some fresh air for a while and cool my head.”

“I will allow just one cup of wine if you want to drink. It’s this cold. Even Elizavetta won’t complain.”

As Ellen replied so, Rurick saluted and left the tent.

Ellen was now alone in the tent.

With her arms still folded and a serious expression, the Wind Princess of the ^{Silvfrau} Silverflash was motionlessly staring at empty space.

On the other side, it was the camp of the Lebus army. In the tent for the supreme commander, meeting Elizavetta and Urz was the knight Naum who served as the Vanadis' close aide.

Though he was in his mid-thirties, he had many white hairs mixed with the black hair, and deep wrinkles harking back to hardship (labor) were carved on his face which carefully shaped his beard.

Naum was one of the few men who favorably received Urz, whose identity was unknown.

Elizavetta did not break her proud attitude until she entered the tent, but when gazes other than that of Urz and Naum disappeared, she floated an unusually cheerful smile.

“Urz. Take a rest until the war council.”

“...Is it all right for me to attend?”

Urz reservedly asked. This was because it was clear that it was him who was the cause of the clash between the two Vanadis. Elizavetta nodded with an expression saying “obviously”.

“If I take someone else, it would be rather suspicious. You should be stately as my attendant.”

“Thank you.”

While preparing a chair for her, Urz, somewhat puzzled, gave words of thanks. Naum, who lit a candlestick, asked the red-haired Vanadis.

“Shall I get any fruit water?^{Kvass[2]}”

“It’s fine. I will immediately go out after resting for a while.”

“Understood. I will be outside, so please call me if you need something.”

Naum winked at Urz and left from the tent.

“I will also leave your side for a short while.”

Urz was also about to leave the tent following Naum, but in a place where he turned his back to his Lord, he was suddenly called to stop. As he turned around, the Vanadis of Rainbow ^{Laziris} Eyes stared at him with an awkward face. Her dignity of commander who gave orders to soldiers one after another could not be felt from her now.

“Not a word to anyone about what we talked about with Eleanora.”

Urz made a troubled smile. This was because Naum wanted to ask precisely about that. However, as a look similar to his master’s entreaty was turned, rather than because it was an order, he felt like she was pitiful and did not say no.

“Even if I explain the outline, how about I don’t go over all the subtleties such as what kind of words we exchanged?”

“Then, it’s fine.”

Elizavetta made a look which seemed dissatisfied, but her voice was not that much so. It seemed that she was trying to keep up her dignity now. Urz endured to smile wryly, bowed and left the tent this time for sure.

Cold wind suddenly blew through the youth's body. The sky which he looked up at while shivering was gloomy, and the moon and stars were gradually increasing their brightness.

Campfires were built in various places of the camp and the soldiers began preparations for dinner. In a furnace which hardened and built the earth into a mass, they put a pan. From the pan, white steam rose and melted in the night air.

Around the pan, if there were soldiers who were holding out their hands towards the fire of the furnace, there were also soldiers who warmed their bodies by rubbing distributed distilled Vodka to their hands and feet. Seeing that, there were also soldiers who grieved saying "what a waste".

---If I remember correctly, it was ^{Ukha[3]}fish soup tonight.

It was a dish familiar in Zchted, made by putting plenty of water in the pan and carefully cooking fish and vegetables cut into chunks. Today, they used salted cod, onion, potatoes and carrots. The seasoning was only the salt used on the cod, but it was enough since it was quite strong.

Urz who was absent-mindedly staring at them was called and looked back at that direction. Naum was standing there. He was holding a bottle of fruits water and two big pieces of rye bread.

“We don’t know when the war council would be over after all. It isn’t something warm, but eat.”

“Thank you.”

Urz received the bread. Since he was hungry, he was honestly thankful.

“However, it’s cold. Let’s talk while walking?”

“Is it all right even if we are away from master’s side?”

“There are soldiers looking out, so it’s fine for just a little. There isn’t much time until the war council either.”

The two walked side by side while biting bread.

“Though I can guess, tell me what happened. Why was the war council reported at after a half koku?”

Urz briefly explained what happened. About the fact that Ellen and Rurick called him Tigre. That Elizavetta

denied it and it turned into a quarrel. Then he broke in between them and answered that he was Elizavetta's servant.

“—and, Vanadis-sama of LeitMeritz apologized to master so we started over again.”

Urz looked up at the knight who was probably about ten years older than him with an expression which seemed sorry. While he was talking, Naum had a sullen look all along and the wrinkles on his face were deepening. Moreover, his white hairs which were not few might further increase.

Naum who finished hearing the story grandly sighed while patting the wrinkles of his face with a finger.

“I see. No, you did well. Anyway, the worst scenario was avoided.”

The time when Elizavetta said that she went to the war council with Urz, Naum was vehemently opposed to it. He was most apprehensive about the possibility that the two Vanadis would clash head on.

“Naum-san. There is something that I want you to tell me.”

As he swallowed his bread, took the bottle of fruit water and moistened his mouth, Urz looked at Naum with a serious expression. Since Naum was in the midst of having stuffed bread into his mouth, he nodded his head silently.

“Do I resemble the person called Tigrevurmud that much?”

“...I don’t know.”

Naum who finally swallowed the bread answered while wiping his mouth.

“Both Vanadis-sama and I never happened to see That Tigrevurmud Vorn person. But, we have heard about him. If Vanadis-sama of LeitMeritz said so, you are probably as alike as two melons at least.”

Naum explained about Tigrevurmud Vorn. That he was the man who brilliantly put an end to the civil war which occurred in the Brune Kingdom last year, and also the man who repulsed the Muozinel army of 20000 soldiers which had invaded Brune with only 2000 soldiers.

“They say that especially his bow skill was outstanding. He never misses a prey which he aimed at no matter how far it was: it seems that when he shoots an arrow, his target will surely be brought down. There is also a rumor that he killed a dragon.”

“It doesn’t sound like it’s about me.”

Urz smiled wryly and shrugged his shoulders. Even this youth knew Dragon’s scales were of a hardness that even a forged steel sword was not able to make a dent in. Though Naum laughed, he put on a serious face right away.

“It’s also possible that you have only forgotten.”

Both of their feet were halted simultaneously. In a calm tone, Naum said.

“If you want, we shall try to negotiate with LeitMeritz after this matter is over. That they look after you and investigate about your identity. LeitMeritz has friendly relations with the Brune Kingdom. Information of that country should be available more abundantly to them than to Lebus.”

Urz did not immediately reply and looked downward as he was lost in thought.

“There is another thing I want to ask you, may I ask about it first?”

While receiving the bottle of fruit water, Naum nodded. Urz asked, his eyes filled with pure doubt

“Why is master that much concerned about me?”

Judging from what he heard from Naum before, Elizavetta took a liking to him because she highly evaluated his skill with the bow, and also because he was the first subordinate she chose herself.

However at the quarrel with Ellen, Elizavetta shouted “My Urz”.

Even considering the fact that her feelings were highly strung, would such words come out with just that? Urz found it strange. Moreover, only one month had passed since he came to work at the Imperial Palace of Lebus.

Naum who was thrown the question stared in wonder, and stared at the youth with an amazed face. Urz

inwardly looked puzzled about whether what he said was so strange.

As Naum shook his head on both sides with a troublesome face and groaned while patting the wrinkles of his face, he sighed.

“Have you ever been told that you were slow (dense)?”

“Slow (dense)...?”

“You are slow (dense), eh. You’re truly slow. Well, let’s pretend that it’s because you lost your memory.”

At Urz who blankly stood stock still, Naum who emphasized the word “slow” laughed as amazed.

“There is the fact that she highly evaluated your skill with the bow. Also the fact that for the first time, you’re a subordinate she chose by herself. I did say these two things before, didn’t I?”

Urz nodded. Suddenly, the figure of one girl emerged in his head.

It was that of the silver-haired Vanadis he met just a while ago. In order to let a person she met for the first time feel familiarity she brought out a bright smile, and said.

---You're my prisoner. Come to think of it, you're the first person I taken as prisoner.

---I fell in love with your skills with the bow.

“...Urz?”

Being called, the youth came to his senses. Naum was staring at Urz with a wondering face.

“What’s wrong? Being absent-minded.”

“No... Um, I was remembering about the time when I met master for the first time.”

Feeling for some reason like he must not talk about Ellen, Urz spoke of something he suddenly thought of. Naum floated a wry smile.

“Yeah. That was terrible.”

When he met Elizavetta for the first time, Tigre was at the beach with villagers. They were attacked by pirates. There were many pirates. If Elizavetta, who was out for a recreational walk, did not happen to pass by then Urz and others would probably not have been saved.

That said, it was hard to honestly say it was fortunate. This was because Elizavetta who wielded a Dragonic Tool and kicked about the pirates made Urz and the others deliver a boat in order to run after the pirates who ran away and moreover ordered them to row the boat. For Naum, who was accompanying Elizavetta at that time, these were memories which made his stomach hurt.

“Urz. When you met Vanadis-sama for the first time, she asked you what you think about her eyes, didn’t she? Do you remember what you answered?”

Holding in his laughter, the knight of pessimistic nature pointed at his own eyes with a finger.

After blinking his eyes several times as he explored his memory, Urz nodded.

“They look like cat’s eyes. I should have answered like so.”

Because he had answered like that, he was pushed in the sea by a villager who was in the same boat. Combining his personal experiences from before and after, there was no way he would forget.

As Naum floated a slightly bitter smile, he diverted his gaze from Urz. He looked at the soldiers who were surrounding the pan in a distant place. Their happy talking voices could be heard until here.

“Even if you ask the soldiers who are here... no, all people working at the Imperial Palace, there will probably be no one who will give the same answer as you.”

With a faraway look, Naum drank a mouthful of fruit water.

“Those eyes of Vanadis-sama are called Rainbow Eyes.^{Laziris} They are designated as a good omen in Lebus, and she is respected. —But, in the place where Vanadis-sama was born and raised, it was the opposite.”

The latter half of the knight’s lines was mixed with bitterness and indignation.

“It’s called ill-omened. Something abominable. Misfortune. It seems to be considered so in that region even now... She was the illegitimate child of a certain noble, but because she was born with those eyes, it’s said she was brought up in a small poor village as an abandoned child who doesn’t know her parents.”

So Elizavetta has been abandoned by her parents. Urz held his breath and his face was distorted with anger. The grizzled knight continued his story.

“Her eye colors are different. But just because of that, she was despised, spoken ill of (cursed) and bullied. From elderly adults to children, there wasn’t a single person who became her friend. She lived such a life everyday until she was ten years old. She doesn’t talk about those days, but there is no doubt that it’s because it was a life so painful that she can’t put it into words.”

“How do you know if master doesn't talk about it?”

“I investigated.”

Naum quickly answered. To the youth who turned an accusatory gaze, he powerlessly laughed.

“Don’t make such a face. I said a while ago that she was the illegitimate child of a noble. As a person who served in Lebus and served her, I had to investigate.”

“...You’re right. I’m sorry.”

Urz immediately reconsidered and apologized to the knight with a tired face. It was only about one month since he came to work in Lebus, but he could understand such a necessity. Naum did not mind it and attached the bottle of fruit water to his mouth.

“Of course, there is no way I would tell Vanadis-sama that I investigated. I pretend that I don’t know the details . Please, also behave like that in front of her.”

“Understood. By the way, did the people of that village know the master’s background?”

As Urz spoke of his question, Naum covered his face with his hands so as to hide his expression.

“You have good intuition... The main people including the village chief knew that she was the daughter of a noble. That’s why they seemed to be careful so as not to let her die. They probably thought that it was fine to bully her, but the judgment was that

the people concerned were to understand the situation only to an extent.”

Urz felt a chill down his spine. It was probably not due to the dark sky and cold wind.

“Back to the story — At 10, she was taken over by her father.”

---There doesn't seem to be a decent reason.

Although Urz looked at Naum's face in profile, he carefully listened without voicing his thought.

“It seems that the child who was going to succeed him died of illness, and she was the only one left who inherited her father's blood. Besides, there are also lands like Lebus who are thankful for the Rainbow^{Laziris} Eyes. He probably noticed that belatedly.”

---So he abandoned her at his convenience and takes her over again at his convenience, huh.

Urz felt indignation at the much too selfish story. The inside of the youth's head heated up to the extent that he

did not care about the night wind. As he perceived it, Naum became silent for a while. It was after ten seconds had passed that he resumed the story.

“It seems that her life under her father wasn’t that pleasant. It’s no wonder. It wasn’t as if her father himself accepted her ^{Laziris} Rainbow Eyes after all. And three years ago. She, who turned 15 years old, became Vanadis.”

“Three years ago...?”

Looking back at Urz who made a puzzled face, Naum nodded with a serious expression.

“When she had come for the first time to Lebus, anyone who could see her understood how perplexed she was. It seemed to be a surprise to her above all else that we were especially pleased with the ^{Laziris} Rainbow Eyes.”

Those eyes of different colors were something ominous. Something disgusting which determined her circumstances (environment). Even she was living while thinking so, it completely changed. For Elizavetta, there was no doubt that it was so much of a shock that it was as if the very universe was overturned.

“As she grew accustomed to life at the Imperial Palace, we came to be asked a certain question by her.”

You. What do you think when you see my eyes? Tell me honestly what you think.

“—I answered ‘they are beautiful like jewels’.”

While shaking the bottle of fruit water to check that it became empty, Naum distorted his mouth.

“I intended to reply sincerely despite my poor vocabulary, but it would be a lie if I say that I didn’t consider my position as retainer. It was not only me, but also the same for those who were asked the question. She probably knew it; whenever she heard an answer, she made a bored-looking face. However—”

Naum floated a somewhat happy smile unlike those until now and looked at Urz. However, an earnest color was dwelling in his pair of eyes.

“You appeared. Honestly, I was amazed at your answer, but I had never seen such a smile of Vanadis-sama until now. I thought that was surely what she had wanted from the bottom of her heart.”

Even looking at her Rainbow^{Laziris} Eyes, he considered them neither an evil nor a good omen.

Without even inquiring the complexion of Elizavetta whom he understood to be a person of high social status at first glance, he expressed his candid thoughts in a composed attitude.

Probably because it was Urz who lost memory, without knowing his identity, had no extra knowledge or prejudice and had no ties of obligation based on the status, he was able to do it.

Naum stretched out his hand and grabbed Tigre's shoulder. He stared straight at the surprised youth.

"I asked you whether you want to go to LeitMeritz, didn't I? I don't intend to overturn my words. If you want, I'll try all possible means. I will also persuade Vanadis-sama. But, speaking my mind, I want you to stay in Lebus and serve Vanadis-sama. I fully understand that what I'm saying is selfish..."

As he spat out all the air which had accumulated within his lungs, Naum span his words at a stretch. Though there was also the fact that his shoulder had

been grabbed, being overwhelmed by the brightness of his more eager eyes than it, Urz was not able to divert his eyes from him.

“—She needs you.”

Naum’s hand which grabbed his shoulder was full of power. Urz frowned and groaned. Naum came to his senses at the voice and hurriedly removed his hand. “Sorry”, he apologized in a low voice.

As Urz shook his head so as to say that he did not mind, he dropped his gaze to the ground. He quietly spilled a sigh.

---I was told something outrageous...

He did not mean to blame Naum. In the first place, it was something which Urz was curious about. Thanks to that, he understood why Elizavetta was fixated on someone like him.

He really did not think that he would find himself dragged into such a serious problem.

---What to do?

He did not dislike Elizavetta. He also owed her for having picked him up. If she had not asked him to serve her that day about one month ago, Urz would have probably been even now in that fishing village. There was no doubt that he would be helping with the village work and earning income little by little for travel expenses.

---However.

The figures of the silver-haired girl and the bald head knight which was following her floated in his mind. Their shouts were desperate and acute. There was sincerity.

---I think that master called her Eleanora.

He tried to mutter it several times in his mouth. Strangely, that name sounded with a pleasant sound in the youth's heart. If it was said that they once had a friendly relationship, he felt that it might have been to the extent of completely doubtless trust.

While Urz was troubled and conflicted, Naum was motionlessly standing in silence. Within the darkness, he was quietly waiting for the youth to give an answer.

Before long, Urz raised his face. He gave words of apology with an apologetic expression.

“I’m sorry.”

Naum did not react immediately; he finally dropped his shoulders after about five seconds passed and sighed.

“No, it’s fine. I’m sorry to have said something which troubles you.”

“No, I think that you have told me an invaluable story. And, I have one request.”

To Urz’s words, Naum put on a dubious face. He urged the youth with his gaze.

“Could you investigate about that Tigrevurmud Vorn person? About what kind of personality and what kind of position he had. The master said that he fell into the sea and died, but is it true? That person... Is it really me?”

Urz emitted each word as he chewed them one by one, and finally concluded like this.

“Until I know it or until I regain my memory, I intend to serve master. I do not want to make any rash promises about master.”

Naum stared wide-eyed and looked down at the youth with a blank face. As he pulled himself together after about one minute, he asked with an evil smile.

“Is it all right? My thought is as I said a while ago. Even if I know a lot of things, I may not tell you anything. No, in the first place I may not even investigate about it.”

“I don’t mind.”

Urz chuckled and answered. Naum trusted him and talked about Elizavetta’s past. Therefore, he also decided to trust him.

When Naum stared at the youth for a while, he floated an amazed smile.

“I’ll count on you from now on. I will do my best for you.”

“Likewise, I hope to get along with you.”

Under the sky in which stars twinkled, the two men exchanged a firm handshake. On the other hand, Urz said while scratching the cheeks shyly.

“By the way, there is one more thing I would like you to tell me.”

“What is it?”

Naum asked while releasing his hand. Urz frowned and asked with an expression like a wavering shooter in the next move in chess.

“Did something happen between our master and Eleanora-sama of LeitMeritz?”

“Why do you think so?”

“I somehow guessed, after seeing master and Eleanora-sama...”

Urz rummaged his darkish red hair and equivocated, but looking at the face of Naum who immediately asked back, he guessed that there seemed to be something.

He did not know what it was. When going to the war council, Elizavetta’s profile could be seen somewhat

hard-pressed. Besides, Ellen's attitude was also strange. Although there was his existence (he was here), would that become so emotional?

“...Well. Before the war council, it's necessary to know the other party more or less.”

Naum inclined his head, and returned his gaze to the youth after turning the bottle of fruit water upside down and drinking only one drop. His eyes were filled with darkness as if looking into a marsh.

“As you guess, there is a connection between the two girls. During autumn about two years ago, a plague occurred in a village which is in a territory under the direct control of the royal family. That village was immediately near to the border of Lebus. Vanadis-sama had burned down all the deceased of the village and isolated those who didn't suffer from the plague for a while.”

Urz nodded with a serious face. He thought that though Elizavetta's coping method was seemingly cruel, it was correct. Even if he was in her position, he would have probably done the same thing in order to prevent the expansion of the plague.

“That village seemed to be a land of memories for Vanadis-sama of LeitMeritz. She offered to take care of those who were isolated.”

“Isn’t it something to be thankful for?”

“But, our Vanadis-sama refused. Saying that two or more Vanadis should not intervene in a village located in a territory under the direct control of the royal family. Actually, the royal family seemed to be dissatisfied about the fact that our Vanadis dealt with it in various ways. They asked whether she doesn't trust His Majesty the King.”

Naum laughed sarcastically and Urz was dumbfounded.

The dealing with the plague was a match vs time. Damage would spread as it was delayed. On that point, the people who could move should be dealt with it sooner; it had nothing to do with either the King or trust.

“It isn’t as if Vanadis-sama left those who were isolated. She prepared materials and food so that they could pass winter, and she also went as far as to send doctors. She also promised assistance about the rebuilding of the village. And that, I will say it again,

even though it's a village located in a territory under the direct control of the royal family. But, most of the people weren't able to pass winter."

Urz strongly bit his lips unintentionally. Just by sympathizing with Elizavetta at that time and Ellen's feelings, an anguished voice seemed to leak from between his teeth

"Vanadis-sama of LeitMeritz blamed our Vanadis-sama. There is no help for it. After all, although she tried all possible means, she turned down an offer and it resulted to this. This is one of their connections (bonds)."

At Naum's last lines, Urz made a wry face.

"...Is there still anything?"

"Yes. It was during almost the same time (period)."

Naum floated a tired smile and began to walk. It was time when he should go back to the camp soon. Urz also walked beside him.

"I told you about the fact that Vanadis-sama's father was a noble, didn't I? It's a person named Rodion Abt,

but this person caused problems. He embezzled (pocketed) the tax paid by the people and gave a false report to the Capital, saying that this year was a poor crop and that it cost a lot of money to repair the bridge. Moreover, he gathered the bandits of his territory and attacked villages and towns of the neighboring feudal lords.”

Naum cut his words for a moment there. The two men looked at each other’s faces filled with discomfort. They could not imagine someone like that being Elizavetta’s father. Naum resumed the story with a depressed face.

“The territory of this Lord Rodion is near LeitMeritz. Naturally, Vanadis-sama of LeitMeritz was ordered to execute his subjugation by His Majesty the King, but our Vanadis-sama requested to be entrusted with this matter. That she will persuade Lord Rodion and makes him atone for his crimes. Vanadis-sama of LeitMeritz accepted it, but—”

“Then, what happened?”

“Lord Rodion didn’t even show up in the place of the negotiation and ran away. And he was killed by Vanadis-sama of LeitMeritz.”

Urz was at a loss for words at the too cruel story.

“Afterwards, our Vanadis-sama challenged Vanadis-sama of LeitMeritz to a duel. She lost. It was a complete defeat.”

Probably due to the fact that he was holding his feelings, Naum’s voice was serene. As for Urz, he was in a state of mind where he wanted to bury his head in his hands. This could no longer be put in order (described) with the word fate (connection).

Wanting to calm down his feelings, Urz asked something trivial.

“Then, did the master inherit the Abt House?”

If he remembered correctly, he explored his memory that there should have been a person named Valentina among the Vanadis. Since she was born of a noble, she had two family names. He wondered whether it should not become so also for Elizavetta.

“On the suspicion of having gone against a royal order, the Abt House was taken and destroyed. Vanadis-sama didn’t deign to defend the Abt House. I understand her feelings. And then, in the autumn of last year—”

To his great surprise, Naum's story was not over. Urz looked at him with a face saying "is there still something?", but the grizzled knight continued his story as if it was a matter of course.

"You know Legnica which is in the south of Lebus, don't you? The Vanadis Alexandra-sama which governed there seemed to hold a relation with Vanadis-sama of LeitMeritz to the extent that you could say that they are close friends... Our Vanadis-sama had advanced our soldiers to that Legnica."

"Give me a break", Urz inwardly grieved so, but he could not stop after coming so far. He put strength in his feet which began to lose strength and firmly stepped on the cold earth.

"At that time, Vanadis-sama of LeitMeritz was in Brune, but she came back with an astonishing speed. She stood before us instead of Alexandra-sama who was lying down due to illness."

"Why did the master attack Legnica?"

“There were political circumstances. If you want to know in detail, you should watch for an opportunity and ask Vanadis-sama.”

Naum gave an ambiguous answer by saying so. It isn't like he could not answer. However, multiple explanations were needed in order to explain it and no matter how he put it, there would be not enough time.

“The fate with Vanadis-sama of LeitMeritz is something like this. We somehow made it in time.”

“Um, could you replace me for the war council?”

With an extremely serious countenance, Urz entreated. Even if Elizavetta took a liking to him, there was nothing more unlucky than to participate in a war council where those two girls met each other. He thought that they endured well, to not fight against each other at that place.

The knight and the youth stopped. Silence wrapped the two people. While shaking the bottle of fruit water which became empty, Naum exaggeratedly shrugged his shoulders.

“Sorry, Urz. If I could, I would also like to replace you, but I can’t come up at all with words to convince Vanadis-sama.”

“Um, a while ago, you said that you will do what you can, didn’t you?”

“What I can do, that is. It is somewhat impossible for me to do this.”

“Isn’t there considerable composure in your voice?”

As Urz pointed out, even though Naum’s voice was tinged with a breathtaking (like) seriousness until just a while ago, now it was calm as if being released from a heavy burden.

“A youth like you needs experience. Good luck.”

“I think that in a place where troubles are expected, an experienced expert is necessary.”

“Even if you run away now, you will someday be entrusted with a big task. Above all, no matter how you think about it, there is no one more qualified than you for this matter. You have eaten the meal and cultivated an

excellent disposition, right? It's all right, if it's you, you can do it."

"If I came to have a stomach ache when eating the bread Naum gave me, I will complain to the master."

The two men did not glare at each other for a long time and floated bitter smiles. Though he was amazed, Urz could not bring himself to hate Naum's determination (stubbornness).

As Naum put his hand on Urz's shoulder, he rounded his back and deeply bowed his head.

"Please. Take over here. You might say that the war council is Vanadis-sama's monopoly^[4]. She doesn't request the opinions of her close aides and there will be instructions/indications beforehand for when you would be allowed to speak. As Vanadis-sama said, you should stand in silence."

"But, what should I do if a quarrel occurs between the master and Vanadis-sama over there?"

"Coax Vanadis-sama somehow. If compelled, I don't mind even if you think of her as a whining child and scold her. I will take responsibility."

“...Please, pray to the gods so that it doesn’t happen.”

Imagining the figure of Elizavetta downhearted like a child who was scolded, Saying so with a fed up face was the utmost Urz could so.

Exactly at the middle of the camps of both armies, one tent was set up. It was something Ellen prepared.

Now within that tent, four men and women were facing each other across an old table. The flame of the candlestick illuminated several maps which were opened on the table to the four people’s faces.

The persons attending were Elizavetta and Urz from Lebus' side, and Ellen and Rurick from LeitMeritz's side.

“—Once again. I am the Vanadis Elizavetta Fomina of Lebus.”

“I’m the Vanadis Eleanora Viltaria of LeitMeritz.”

The two Vanadis along with unamiable faces noosed their mouths, stretched their backs straight and with folded arms turned a dangerous look to the other party. They stuck out their rich bosom to the front so as to provoke.

---It's a beehive, eh.

While stiffening his body to strain, Urz who was standing still next to Elizavetta inwardly muttered such an impression. If it was also dangerous to be near, it was even more dangerous to nudge.

As Rurick who was standing beside Ellen also had the same feeling, his expression was painted out with anxiety and it was hard. Urz became worried about whether he was all right.

Urz and Rurick also respectively gave their names following their Lords and bowed. It was at this time that Urz knew Rurick's name. To that sound, the youth recalled a sensation like something was stuck in the corner of his head, but since the war council had immediately begun, he concentrated there.

The war council smoothly proceeded as if dispelling Urz's worry.

Both Elizavetta and Ellen spread the maps which they respectively brought on the table, and explained their marches until today and the situation of the reconnaissance units using small wooden pieces. The two girls were, as expected, veteran commanders as they could immediately understand the other party's intention without either exposing it in detail.

“It's around ten days if we go ahead through this way by horses from Bydgauche to Pardu.”

“But, Duke Bydgauche obviously deviated from the highway and is advancing. To arrive at Pardu, it will probably take him several again, several days.”

As she raised her face from the several maps put one on another on the table, Ellen looked at the red-haired Vanadis.

“Elizavetta. How many soldiers do you think that Duke Bydgauche is leading? Assuming that he gathered the number of soldiers who can only be gathered in a day or two, that is.”

“From 1500 to 3000. All cavalry. Of course, I think by the intention of 3000 though.”

“3000, huh... It’s as expected of the Duke.”

“Combining both our armies, we are about 2000. It will be tough, eh.”

Rurick groaned with a difficult face. However, his Lord casually shook her head.

“We can’t be careless, but if it’s only a difference of 1000 soldiers, Elizavetta and I will do something about it.”

“How many soldiers could Earl Pardu have?”

“He should have scraped up 1000 together. But, if possible, I don’t want to let the soldiers of Eugene-dono–Earl Pardu fight as a soldier.”

“Why? This is a problem between Duke Bydgauche and Earl Pardu, right?”

As Elizavetta discontentedly frowned, Ellen answered in a cold tone.

“As you said, it will be certainly right that the Earl’s soldiers should shed blood. But frankly speaking, the Earl’s soldiers aren’t strong. The Earl himself isn’t good at war, either. If they lose, their morale will drop and the morale of Duke Bydgauche’s soldiers will rise. It will be too much trouble.”

This was a fact. But, Elizavetta did not change her claim.

“Even if what you say is true, you should let Earl Pardu’s soldiers fight. But, if the Earl wants the shame of being a man who doesn’t send his soldiers to protect his territory, then it’s a different story.”

There was some truth in what Elizavetta said. They did not know what kind of end this matter would reach, but there was no doubt that Eugene was underestimated by the neighboring nobles.

Ellen also understood that, but since she intended to settle things before Duke Bydgauche entered Pardu, she did not request soldiers from the Earl.

If the battle was done outside of Pardu, the reason for Eugene to send soldiers would disappear. Ellen and Elizavetta who received a royal order; prevent and stop

Duke Bydgauche's rampage. This was because it was settled like that (They settled with that conclusion).

Ellen turned a severe look to the map on the table. Neither Elizavetta nor her could yet catch the figure of the Bydgauche army. They would have to assume the worst case — the possibility of a fight in the Pardu territory.

As she spat out a sigh, Ellen answered with a face which seemed to want to say "it can't be helped".

"Understood. However, I have one condition. Let's assume that the soldiers whom the Earl sends are 30 cavalrymen. I will add those 30 cavalrymen in my army. And I will have the Earl stand by in his territory. That's all."

"Can you tell me the reason?"

"Both our armies are only comprised of cavalrymen. Even we add a unit of only infantry there, it will just get in the way. On the other hand, it will be impossible to immediately prepare a large force of cavalry. 30 will probably do. Besides, the soldiers of my army know the Earl's soldiers, but your army doesn't know them."

“Why don’t you let the Earl command those 30 cavalymen?”

To Elizavetta’s question, Ellen floated an amazed smile

.

“Like I said a while ago, the Earl isn’t good at war. Besides, if in addition to your army and my army, the Earl’s army exists on the battlefield, a mediator will be necessary for moving smoothly. I will say this just in case , I don’t want to do it. Elizavetta. Can you perform the supreme command?”

“...Understood. Let’s get the Earl to stand by in Pardu.”

As for Elizavetta, it was unbearable to command a unit of weak soldiers. Depending on the situation, harm would reach the soldiers of her army. It was wise to leave it to Ellen.

“However, if the number of soldiers of the Duke is 3000, it will look good even if either my or your reconnaissance unit finds them. It isn’t as if they are still wondering aimlessly in the north, either.”

As Ellen said so while once gain looking at the map, Elizavetta looked puzzled.

“He may have also divided them into several units and made them advance respectively along different highways. The Duke’s soldiers are skilled after all.”

“Do you know the Duke very well?”

Her red eyes blurring a feeling of surprise, Ellen stared at Elizavetta. The Vanadis of Rainbow Eyes^{Laziris} knitted her brows as she was amazed.

“The Duke is a person who holds a great influence in the northern part of the Kingdom. There is no one among the nobles with a territory in the northern part that doesn’t have any interaction with the Duke.”

“I see... And in the south of the capital?”

Elizavetta shook her head.

“Since he is a person who holds the rights of succession to the throne, I think there are none ...”

Ellen frowned at the word “rights of succession to the throne”. If she remembered correctly, Eugene should also have the rights of succession to the throne.

“When we heard about the fact that he went to the capital, should we have first thought about that point?”

To the mutter which unintentionally leaked, Elizavetta made a dubious face.

“What are you talking about? I don’t like it much when someone keeps a secret from me.”

After Ellen looked at Elizavetta with a overtly annoying face, she spoke with a attitude showing that it couldn’t be helped.

“Even Earl Pardu whom Duke Bydgauche aims at has the rights of succession to the throne. In short, I only thought that it something like that.”

A fight between those with the rights of succession to the throne. Though Ellen interpreted so, Elizavetta narrowed her eyes in displeasure as those words hurt her feelings.

“All this began because of the Vodka that Earl Pardu sent to Duke Bydgauche.”

Poison was contained in the Vodka he sent, and an attendant of Ilda lost his life. It was the reason why Ilda moved his soldiers.

“That poison was contained in the Vodka is to the bitter end Duke Bydgauche’s say (point).”

Ellen retorted immediately. For the silver-haired Vanadis, Earl Pardu Eugene was her teacher of etiquette. So, she knew well his temperament. There was no way that she would remain silent.

“Both of you, let’s put that talk aside for the time being .”

Sensibly understanding that the atmosphere had begun to become dangerous, Urz hurriedly broke in between the two Vanadis. Rurick also raised a loud voice and showed a mind of agreement with Urz.

“He’s absolutely right. Determining the whereabouts of the Bydgauche army is the priority now. By the way Mr. Attendant, what do you think?”

Rurick's utterance was intended to return to the topic, so it was not as if he was particularly waiting for an answer. Urz understood that, but if he did not think of anything, he would embarrass Elizavetta. In order to gain time, the youth said.

"I am sorry, but would you tell me a little more about the person called Duke Bydgauche?"

"That's right. I don't know that much about the Duke, either. It will help if you tell us about him."

Ellen agreed, interrupting her enmity with Elizavetta and turning a fleeting gaze towards Urz. As his eyes met hers, Urz was for some reason shocked. His heart greatly jumped up.

Since she entered this tent, Ellen had never made eye contact with Urz. Even when Urz named himself, she did not even take a glance at him. Rurick on the other hand sent an anxious look several times his way.

However, as if she did notice Urz's unrest, Ellen moved her eyes towards Elizavetta. The red-haired Vanadis also pulled herself together and explained.

“The Duke has a personality which is the very picture of honesty. Even you would say that he's a person who fits the nature of running in the field leading soldiers rather than being in front of a work desk, but he isn't someone who will try to settle anything by force.”

“Hou”, Ellen raised a voice in admiration. There seemed to be some sympathy within. Elizavetta continued her explanation.

“His command of soldiers is good, but the Duke himself is also an excellent warrior. Be it a sword or horse, I would say there is no one more skilled than the Duke in the north.”

“If he is such a man, his confidence as a soldier will also be deep. What are his most recent achievements?”

“He received His Majesty's order about two months ago and subdued the barbarians who were damaging the north. There will be a lot of nobles feeling indebted to that.”

The existence of brigands and barbarians was a common, everlasting trouble to the nobles who possessed a territory.

Even if he subdued the bandits lurking in their territory, other bandits would come in from the outside of the territory. Those who committed a heavy crime and were banished from villages and towns, and penniless mercenaries might degrade themselves to bandits. Even if they dispatched soldiers and dove them away, they would come back and attack the villages and towns when it would cool down.

As for the hired soldiers that were few and the nobles who were not so strong, a great number of strong soldiers will be hired, the existence of someone like Ilda who was an excellent commander was extremely promising.

“Then, the Duke will let us pass through while he goes through the territories of friendly nobles; there is a possibility that Pardu may be targeted huh.”

“I cannot deny it, but isn’t it too dangerous?”

Elizavetta looked puzzled. Both Ellen and Elizavetta had dispatched soldiers to the nobles which owned a territory along the highway to gather information along with greetings. If someone leaked the existence of Ilda even a little, it would be likely to be found.

Ellen, apparently not intending to adhere to her plan, too, quickly nodded when Elizavetta presented her question.

“That’s right. Then, where is he...?”

“Is it okay if I express my thoughts?”

It was Urz who said so and looked at Elizavetta and Ellen. While the two Vanadis were talking, this youth had been thinking over something while looking at the map, but he came up with a certain thing.

When he confirmed that the two girls nodded, Urz poked one point in the map with his finger.

That finger was going down the map to the south.

“Didn’t Duke Bydgauche go south in this way?”

It was the mountains and hills dotted from the north to the south that Urz pointed with his finger. Connecting them, he completed one line which reached from Bydgauche to Pardu.

Of course, he didn’t meandered it in a straight line, but if advancing just like that, it was also unlikely to be

found by the reconnaissance units sent by Ellen and Elizavetta without encountering their armies. This was because both of them hardly sent reconnaissance units to the mountains and hills.

“It’s an interesting idea.”

Ellen brightened her red pupils and happily laughed.

“But, it’s difficult to pass through the mountains and hills in this season. It’s for that reason that both Elizavetta and I didn’t send reconnaissance units there.”

Even the snow which immediately melted in the plains remained on the mountains and hills without disappearing. It piled up little by little, covered the ground and made the pace of men and horses grow dull. The air which grew cold by snow took heat. While hiding important landmarks, one could let you get an illusion as if there was footing there.

Stories about the fact that a party of powerful soldiers stepped on the mountains of winter, met with an accident and were annihilated were too many to count in snow countries like Zchted. Moreover, neither Ellen nor Elizavetta did think that Ilda who was referred to as battle expert would brave such a danger.

“Even if he chooses the lowest mountains as possible and advanced in a place with little snow, the soldiers’ fatigue will pile up. And their march will become dull.”

“Urz. Duke Bydgauche should have thought to quickly move and settle things at a stroke. Otherwise, he should have dignifiedly advanced on the highway.”

Elizavetta spoke to Urz with an admonishing tone. She did not intend to scold him such as “don’t say unnecessary things”. In her eyes of different colors, the thought about how she should comfort this amnesic servant was blurring. However, Urz shook his head.

“Can’t they solve that problem if they use sleds?”

The silver-haired Vanadis stared wide-eyed and the red-haired Vanadis unintentionally dropped her gaze on the map. From the mouth of Rurick who was watching the three people’s exchanges, a groan of admiration leaked out.

“If it’s Duke Bydgauche, he may be able to immediately prepare about 1000 or 2000 sleds.”

“That’s right. If he loads armor, food and fuel and dare to choose a place with snow...”

Staring at the map, the two Vanadis discussed.

Even if he used sleds, the march through the mountains and hills would be hard (difficult), and it did not change the fact that it was dangerous. But, the march speed was fairly different. Urz said.

“Even on the plains, if there are no obstructions, smoke from campfires and cooking will be seen far away. If it was from above a mountain or hill, it could be seen more clearly. Especially in this season.”

It was winter now. So as not to let the soldiers freeze, it was necessary to light a fire no matter what. Not only was the campfire used as light, but it was also for soldiers to warm themselves. As for the meal, if they could not prepare warm soup and stew, the morale would remarkably fall.

“Conversely, the situation on the mountains and hills will be hard to see from the plain. We should hide

ourselves amongst the many trees so that the opponents might not discover us here, all the more since we will light a fire within the shade of mountains.”

To Urz’s words, Ellen and Elizavetta looked at each other. The plan which they thought to be absurd was tinged with a touch of reality.

“It was a blind spot. However, you did well to think of the fact that they could use sleds.”

Floating a smile which said “well done”, Ellen frankly praised Urz. The youth rummaged his darkish red hair as embarrassed.

“I was a stable boy until just the other day. Beside the harness such as stirrup and saddle, I was doing the care of sleds—”

“Stable boy!?”

Two shouts of surprise finely overlapped interrupting Urz’s words. It was Ellen’s and Rurick’s shouts. The silver-haired Vanadis stared at Elizavetta with a dumbfounded face. Although the Vanadis of ^{Laziris} Rainbow Eyes flinched to that gaze, she pouted and said.

“D-Do you have any complaints?”

“It isn’t really like I have any complaints, but...”

With an expression showing her hesitation to speak, Ellen alternately stared at the faces of the lord and retainer of Lebus.

“There is a limit to a great selection. Aren’t the soldiers anxious about it?”

“...There is no problem.”

Although Elizavetta stuck out her chest and answered, her voice was lacking in strength any way.

“Well, it’s fine. It isn’t my hobby to interfere in others’ personnel affairs after all.”

Ellen did not try to pursue further and changed the topic to how they should move from now on.

“I... I agree with the present opinion. The Bydgauche army is advancing through the mountains and hills by using sleds. I would like to precede the thought on that premise.”

In a place where Ellen hesitated to say, Elizavetta narrowed her eyes. But, since the silver-haired Vanadis proceeded to talk as if there was nothing, she nodded in silence.

“From now on, I will head to Pardu while sending a reconnaissance unit to the mountains and hills. In order to borrow soldiers. What would you do?”

“I will go south, too. I will go by through a highway different from you. To find Duke Bydgauche’s army, it would be better than moving together, right? Besides—”

Although she hesitated for an instant, Elizavetta continued.

“If I find Duke Bydgauche’s army ahead, I want to persuade the Duke.”

Elizavetta had interactions with Ilda. Besides, the demand of the royal palace was to stop the Duke. Her proposal seemed to be very natural.

“...Understood. If it happens, I leave it to you.”

Afterwards, the two girls began the examination of the details such as communication means and the war council duly ended.

Chapter 2 – Before Dawn

To the north of Pardu, there was a slightly elevated hill where trees grew sparsely.

The Bydgauche army of 3000 led by Ilda Krutis was on that hill. About 50 horsemen looked out in every direction from the hill, and the remaining soldiers were resting at the foot of the hill.

As Urz thought, they did not go through the highway; they were advancing through the mountains and hills using sleds.

Far overhead of them, the white, dim winter sun was slowly descending to the western sky. The almost cloudless sky was watching over the sun with a bleak blue.

“Still one and a half koku until the day falls, huh...”

Ilda who was standing at the vanguard of the soldiers looked up at the sky, and muttered with a difficult face. He wore armor on his tall figure, held his helmet under his arm and a sword was hung on his waist. Though his

suntanned, finely chiseled face was filled with a preternatural anger and determination, fatigue could also be seen.

Since he left Bydgauche ten days ago, he let his soldiers diligently rest, but Ilda himself hardly took a rest. He was originally the owner of such a stouthearted disposition that he could sleep soundly even in a battlefield, but this time he had not slept that much.

The sense of grief and guilt towards his attendant who lost his life, the anger towards Earl Pardu and the distrust to the King. All those melted together, combined and overexcited Ilda's emotions.

While looking at the sun which feebly illuminated the ground, Ilda pondered over something.

---If we advance to the south like this, we will enter Pardu.

So far, they were able to march without anyone standing in their way. However, it would not go so well from here on. Eugene's soldiers should block their way in order to protect their lord.

In addition, there was no doubt that the neighboring nobles who were commanded by the King would appear

leading soldiers in order to stop them. Actually, the soldier sent on reconnaissance had seen the troops going through the highway nearby.

---According to the soldier's report, those troops seemed to have raised the Black ^{Zirnitra} Dragon Flag and the battle flag of Lebus.

There was no one among his soldiers in the northern part of the Kingdom who did not know Lebus' battle flag which drew a golden curve on a vivid purple ground. So, he did not think that the soldiers made a mistake.

---Then, it means that it's Vanadis-dono who is chasing me, huh.

At this time, Ilda had not noticed the existence of the LeitMeritz army led by Ellen.

Seeing the campfire and smoke from cooking from above the mountains and hills, he grasped the rough number of enemies and their position, but he thought that all of them were only the Lebus army. He misled his judgment about the fact that there were as many soldiers of the LeitMeritz army as the Lebus army.

If the reconnaissance unit had approached the enemy troops nearer, they might have seen LeitMeritz's battle flag which drew a silver sword on a black ground.

But, Ilda, rather than gathering information about the enemy, gave priority to the fact that he had to hurry and not be discovered by the enemy. In addition, the current him was tired and was somewhat lacking composure, too.

He did not even consider the fact that other than Elizavetta, another Vanadis would come with her army.

Ilda ordered his attendant who was beside him and called three subordinates. Each of them, while having enough skill as one warrior, also possessed the ability to be able to command 1000 soldiers. Ilda had divided the soldiers under him into three squads and entrusted them with each.

When the subordinates gathered, Ilda told them the plan from here on.

“We will camp out here today. When the day breaks, we will head to the closest highway and from there we will aim at the town of Litomyšl where Earl Pardu is.”

In order to avoid an encounter with the enemy until now, they dared to deviate from the highway and went ahead through the mountains and hills. But, as expected the march towards the maintained highway was faster. There, the soldiers would also advance without getting too much tired.

Besides, near Litomyšl where Eugene's mansion was, there were no conspicuous mountains and hills. They had to go towards the highway somewhere.

“Your Excellency, shouldn't we advance through here throughout the night? We have come so far without soldiers dropping out and we aren't that much tired, either. We shall display our will to the cowardly bastard who used poison.”

One of the subordinates expressed an assertive opinion in a powerful voice. The fact that their march did not get dull and they did not get dropout soldiers while daringly going ahead through the mountains and hills would also display the high level of Ilda's capability.

Ilda turned his gaze towards the other two. Receiving it, one of them opened his mouth.

“I agree with him. Although we are all from Zchtet, this neighborhood isn’t as cold as the north where we live. I think that we can advance even if the day set.”

The last one remained silent, but he clearly nodded his head. This meant that he was of the same opinion as the other two.

However, Ilda shook his head to his subordinates’ advice.

“Keep in mind that here is already the Earl’s territory. We are unfamiliar with the geography. We shouldn’t act recklessly.”

“But, I heard that Earl Pardu is a person who lacks experience in war. Even if he has devised some kind of trap, there is no way we will fall for it.”

“The enemy is not only Earl Pardu.”

To Ilda’s sharp voice, the subordinates were startled and gasped. The Lebus army led by the Flash Princess of the Thunder Swirl Elizavetta Fomina was near.

^{Isgriifa}

Just by looking up to Ilda with great honor in bravery as the supreme commander, the soldiers of Bydgauche were used to fighting. Regardless of whether the enemy was the Lebus soldiers, they had the mental attitude to fight without drawing back even one step.

But even for them, the existence called ‘Vanadis’ was great. The figure of the Vanadis standing at the vanguard of the soldiers, freely wielding her Dragon^{Viralt}ic Tool and mowing down all enemies was the object of awe and aspiration.

Similarly, Ilda knew only too well Elizavetta’s strength. This was because he had taught her the basics of the sword before.

He did not doubt the fact that Vanadis of Rainbow^{Laziris} Eyes alone could be a match for a thousand soldiers. Even the soldiers led by her would probably display more power than before. Although her army was one third of the number of his army, she was an opponent against whom he could by no means be careless.

“I understand that you are impatient. Pardu is just around the corner after all. But, it’s precisely for this reason that we must move carefully.”

Ilda’s words seemed to be persuading himself rather than admonishing his subordinates.

“Start with the preparation for camping at once. And then, send reconnaissance units in every direction. We must confirm whether there is no enemy nearby before the day falls completely.”

When the three subordinates simultaneously bowed, they left by running in order to execute the supreme commander’s orders.

Then, it was after a half koku that there were reports from the reconnaissance units. It was about when the Bydgauche army finished the installation of their camp. Ilda received the reports in the tent for the supreme commander use.

“I state! From here to the north at about five Belsta, we discovered troops numbering about 1000 soldiers. They are flying the Black ^{Zirnitra} Dragon Flag and Lebus’s battle flag!”

“So Vanadis-dono already came up to there...!”

A shiver ran down Ilda’s spine. He quickly drew the map of the surroundings in his head.

Five Belsta (about 5 Km). If there were cavalry, it was a distance of less than a half koku.

As Ilda stood up, he left the tent with calm steps. In order not to worry the soldiers, too, he had to endeavor for a composed speech and behavior.

The sky which he looked up at started to be dye with sunset. An indigo blue and vermillion bisected the sky; the bright red was dazzling to the eyes as it went towards the west and darkness thickened as it went towards the east.

The ridge line of the mountain ranging farther to the west was brightened in golden light, but the mountain itself was black like a shadow . When shifting the gaze to the east, the plain covered with dry grass basked in the setting sun and looked reddish.

“Isn’t it a quite beautiful sky? It’s a shame that the person we both admire is only a man.”

To Ilda who spoke of a poor joke, the subordinate who was beside him promptly cracked a joke.

“With all due respect, Your Excellency. I deem the women who will think to admire a sunset to be very few. What most women think seeing the sunset will probably be dinner and tomorrow’s weather.”

“That’s why you still celibate even though you're 30 years old.”

Ilda shrugged his shoulders and laughed. The soldiers who heard their exchanges nearby also laughed without reservation.

There was no one among them who was dissatisfied towards this dispatch of troops. There were only people who held Ilda in high esteem and would gladly follow him if he gave orders. Therefore, they had pushed their way to the mountains and hills even in this season.

While looking at the soldiers’ conditions, Ilda was thinking about something completely different in his head.

---After a little less than a half koku, the day will sink completely. Even if the Lebus army shortens the distance, they will no longer be in a state in which they can fight. But...

It was troublesome that the Lebus army was in the north. If the Bydgauche army was going to go towards Pardu as planned, they would found themselves in the situation where they had their back turned to the Lebus army.

---If Earl Pardu is to organize his troops and leads them towards here, we will be caught in a pincer from the front and back. I must avoid it.

Ilda immediately drew a conclusion. His back to the soldiers' laughter, he gave orders to his attendant while returning to the tent.

"Send a messenger to the Lebus army. Prepare the soldiers so that they can fight at any time."

It was four days after the war council with Ellen that the Lebus army caught the back figure of the Bydgauche army. By the way, they had found the Bydgauche army several hours earlier than the Bydgauche army had discovered them.

“To think that they came until such a place, I should say as expected of Ilda-sama.”

Elizavetta who heard the report of the reconnaissance unit muttered with admiration. If they were another one day later, the Bydgauche army would have probably entered the Pardu territory. It was a close one.

“It’s your merit, Urz.”

On horseback, Elizavetta looked back at Urz who was on the side. The youth only bowed. Since they were the soldiers’ eyes, he avoided an outstanding reaction. Elizavetta also understood it. She then faced forward not caring about Urz more than necessary.

---*At any rate.*

It occurred to her when he was working as a stable boy . Urz said so, but was it true?

---Tigreurmud Vorn is the man who killed Duke Thenardier and won Brune's civil war. Even if he loses his memory, that ability might not be lost.

Elizavetta violently shook her head and denied that thought.

He is not Tigre. He is Urz.

If she herself did not think so first of all, then she would probably not be able to make others believe it.

“Vanadis-sama. Do we send a messenger to His Excellency the Duke's place?”

“Not yet. There is something that can be done first.”

As she was asked by Naum, Elizavetta answered so. Adjusting her army's ranks, she ordered to dispatch reconnaissance units at the surroundings and investigate the geographical features.

“Will it become a war?”

“I don't know.”

With a stern look, Elizavetta answered Naum's question.

"I don't know what will happen. And it also won't be strange even if something happens. It's a battlefield, isn't it?"

No matter what kind of past she had, even if she had a face suitable of her age, Elizavetta was after all a Vanadis. Naum turned his horse and issued instructions to the soldiers.

Seeing the grizzled knight off, Elizavetta muttered in her mouth.

"If it's the usual Ilda-sama, it will be good even without thinking about such a thing..."

According to what she heard from the royal palace's messenger who requested this from her and from Ellen, it was when Ilda was in his mansion in the capital that he was given the poisoned Vodka. And he, who lost his attendant, returned to his territory Bydgauche in a hurry, gathered soldiers and prepared weapons, food and fuel.

---I wonder how many days it takes from the capital Silesia to Bydgauche. Assuming it's ten days on horse back and forth, if one prepares substitutes horse and hurries, it's likely to be reduced up to three or four days.

The highways which connected the territories of those with the Duke rank and the capital should be maintained. Ilda excelled at horse-riding and he also had stamina. He even had assets which could supply multiple horses immediately. If he felt like it, he might also keep riding on horse all day and night.

As for Elizavetta, the question was why Ilda purposely returned to his territory while being in the capital. Wasn't the best thing to do, go to Earl Pardu's mansion and blame him, or appeal to the King who was in the capital?

But, Ilda chose neither of these.

He returned to his territory, gathered soldiers and right now was going to attack Earl Pardu's territory. It did not take only time and effort. No matter what kind of results it turned out to be and assuming that the kingdom would be confused, Ilda would not escape from criticism.

---Was he unable to make a proper judgment or was there another reason?

Elizavetta did not know what kind of state of mind Ilda was in. She should also take into consideration the fact that he could judge her to be an enemy and suddenly attack.

Since she did not understand, Elizavetta was watching the Bydgauche army's situation and keeping a distance of five Belsta; while preparing so that they might be able break into a battle at any time.

It was about a little less than a half koku until the end of the day, that the messenger of the Bydgauche army showed up before the Lebus army.

It was the very time when the Lebus army was setting their camp. If a war occurred, it would get in the way, so they had postponed the setting of camp until the very last minute; but looking at the sky which began to darken , they reluctantly started the work.

After the messenger gave his weapon into custody he was let through, going in front of Elizavetta, still straddling his horse.

“Man of Bydgauche. I am glad that you have come.”

Under the sky which gradually increased the darkness, overlooking the messenger on horseback, Elizavetta gorgeously smiled. By the way, Urz was hanging up a torch with fire next to her. Naum did not do so because it was his duty to wield a sword when push comes to shove.

The Bydgauche’s messenger respectfully bowed and conveyed Ilda’s demand after expressing formal greetings.

“Our lord, His Excellency the Duke wants a discussion with Vanadis-sama. Please, I would like you to grant it...”

After Elizavetta generously nodded, she set two conditions. That both of them could only bring two attendants and that they had the discussion at a place exactly in the middle of both armies.

Once the messenger returned to the Bydgauche army, he showed up again before Elizavetta after a half koku.

“His Excellency the Duke has agreed about the discussion’s place. But, about the attendants, he says that

he would like both of you and him to come with at least 50 cavalrymen.”

In the tent, Urz who was beside Elizavetta stared wide eyes. He thought that the Duke was surprisingly wary. However, Naum who was standing next to the youth remained calm as if expecting that demand and the Vanadis whom they served also answered with a graceful smile.

“Yes. I don’t mind it.”

When the Bydgauche army’s messenger went back, Elizavetta looked back towards her two attendants.

“Urz. Naum. Only you two will accompany me.”

“Will you try to persuade His Highness the Duke?”

As Urz asked so as to check, fluttering her red hair to the wind tinged with cold, the Vanadis of Rainbow Eyes^{Laziris} floated a lonely smile.

“I would like it if possible. Judging from the fact that he came up to here at this speed, Ilda-sama’s determination is firm. So, it would be better not to expect too much.”

The discussion was carried out exactly in the middle of both armies. They did not set a tent like at the time of Elizavetta and Ellen's war council. The only light was the flame of torches held by the soldiers and the brightness of the moon and stars inlaid in the night sky.

Elizavetta, accompanied only by Urz and Naum, went there. There were of course a lot of soldiers who raised an objection to this, but the red-haired Vanadis personally persuaded them.

"Ilda-sama will surely bring 50 cavalrymen. If I was to take the same number as him, there will definitely be people who will not be able to bear the tension and will rampage. Therefore, so as not to stimulate the enemy, only the three of us will go. If you understand it, calmly see us off."

Even so, several soldiers held on saying "take at least only me" unanimously, but as she stared at them with her eyes of different colors, they became quiet. Rather than a persuasion, it was more like coercion.

When Elizavetta and company reached the agreed place like that, Ilda accompanied by 50 cavalrymen was already waiting. The flame of torches which they were holding let the shadows of 50 horsemen emerge within the darkness.

To Urz who unintentionally hardened his body, Naum casually brought his horse near him and whispered.

“Do you remember what Vanadis-sama had said before coming here?”

Urz moved only his eyes towards Naum and nodded. *I don't mind if you escape if compelled.* Elizavetta said so to Urz and Naum. She also said that be it fifty or one hundred soldiers, she could handle them by herself alone .

Urz thought that it was probably not a lie. The figure of Elizavetta, who mowed down most of the pirates in an instant at the time when they met for the first time, vividly remained in his memory.

Naum put his mouth close to his ear and continued talking.

“Listen. If something were to happen, you should run back to the camp without looking aside. You don’t need to worry about Vanadis-sama or me.”

“But, I...”

“If you don’t run away first, I won’t be able to escape, depending on the situation. Besides, it’d be better that there is no ally around in order for Vanadis-sama to wield her whip.”

Naum said in a tone which posed as a joke. While Urz was wondering to what extent he was serious, the distance between Elizavetta and Ilda was shortening.

“Vanadis-dono. I thank you for accepting a discussion in spite of such time. I would like to ask without delay, but why are you here?”

The Duke’s gaze was wearing sharpness as to cut. But, Elizavetta received Ilda’s gaze without flinching and answered back.

“You should know why, right Ilda-sama? It’s in order to stop you.”

“...Do you know the circumstances?”

After a short pause, Ilda asked. Elizavetta nodded.

“I understand your feelings.”

When Elizavetta asked Ilda the name of his attendant, she prayed to the gods for the dead soul to rest in peace. Ilda deeply bowed with a sad look.

“I thank you for praying for my attendant.”

Both eyes of Ilda were filled with an intense fighting spirit as he raised his face and said so.

“Vanadis-dono. You said that you came to stop us. Taking it into account, I would like to ask. Can’t you pretend that you didn’t see us?”

The Duke in his prime shouted, his voice shaking.

“I finally came until here! I won’t attack villages or towns which have nothing to do with it. I will defeat those who stand in my way, but do nothing to those who don’t resist. I promise on my name. So—”

“I refuse.”

With no room for consideration, Elizavetta immediately replied.

The atmosphere became filled with tension and got heavy. Behind Ilda, several sounds of armors resounded in succession. The 50 Bydgauche cavalrymen were showing signs that they were likely to attack at any moment.

Urz swallowed his saliva. He exchanged glances with Naum who was next to him. Though Naum frowned, he immediately gave up and they nodded to each other.

Elizavetta said that she would not mind even if they ran away, but neither Urz nor Naum felt like running away, leaving their lord. Grasping a torch, Urz stared straight at the 50 cavalrymen.

Suddenly, Ilda raised his hand. As he looked back at his soldiers, he roared with a sharp voice.

“Is the reason why you are here in order to threaten a youth who doesn’t even have a weapon? Just because Vanadis-dono trusted us, only the three of them came!

How will the military art of Bydgauche, which the leaders and comrades-in-arms have built up, be regarded as?”

It was by no means loud, but it was a well-projected voice filled with dignity. The cavalymen stiffened their bodies as if being struck by thunder. The dangerous fighting spirit which they were wearing disappeared at once.

As Ilda turned towards Urz, he bowed.

“I apologize for my subordinates. They are irritated due to the long journey. It’s not something which can be resolved with just an apology, but please can’t you forgive them?”

Urz did not immediately answer; he was fixedly staring at Ilda with a surprised face.

Elizavetta aside, he was only a servant. Nevertheless, this Duke bowed his head to him and apologized.

---*Why is such a person...?*

As Urz fixed his breathing, he slowly opened his mouth while carefully choosing his words.

“Um, May I say something to His Excellency the Duke ? I am called Urz and I serve master... Vanadis-sama.”

Ilda nodded silently and urged Urz. The youth swallowed his saliva once again. He felt not only Ilda’s and the soldiers’ glances, but also those of Elizavetta and Naum around his cheeks.

“With your permission, I would like to ask. Shouldn’t His Excellency the Duke’s anger be directed to the royal palace in the capital? His Majesty the King was also troubled to the point of sending Vanadis-sama here. How about you first call out to the Earl to come to the royal palace, and in case that he don’t move, with the soldiers again—”

“I can’t do that.”

Ilda rejected Urz’s desperate appeal with a short sentence.

“...If you don’t mind, could you tell us the reason?”

“I can’t also do that.”

This was probably what it meant to be unapproachable. Ilda's expression was so stark that the attitude he showed a little while ago was unthinkable, and his tone was cold, too.

---Why?

Urz felt impatience and irritation. Ilda did not look like someone who liked to fight. However, it seemed that he did not feel like choosing a way other than fighting.

Still, Urz tried to hold on, but before that a hand was stretched and restrained the youth.

"Enough, Urz. You did well."

It was Elizavetta's. As Urz stepped back, the Vanadis of Rainbow ^{Laziris} Eyes glared at Ilda and his soldiers with a haughty smile.

"If you don't want to retreat no matter what, we will have no other choice but to fight against you, Ilda-sama."

In the Vanadis' high-handed attitude, Ilda certainly felt her thought "please, I want you to retreat". Moreover, he responded like a lump of ice with calm and coldness.

“I said it before, Vanadis-dono. We took sword and spear, wore armor, rode horses and came here in order to fight. We will defeat all those who stand in our way. Even if it is you.”

“...Even after hearing that not only my troops, but another 5000 soldiers are heading towards here?”

To Elizavetta’s words, Ilda opened his eyes wide. As expected, 5000 was a number that he could not ignore. But, he immediately regained a calm expression.

“Be it 5000 or 10000, it won’t change what I have to do.”

Silence fell. Words to talk any further no longer came out from the two people’s mouth. This silence was to confirm it. Only Urz held his irritation and was watching the two.

It was Ilda who opened his mouth first. He floated a smile and said.

“Good luck. Vanadis-dono.”

“Thank you. I will get victory from you without holding back.”

Elizavetta also answered with a smile. Then, she turned her horse.

“Let’s go, you two.”

Urz and Naum followed after their lord. While feeling on their back gazes as to feel pain.

Thus, the discussion ended without crop.

Ilda who saw off the trio returned to his camp followed by the 50 cavalrymen.

On the way back to his camp, the Duke in his prime made a bitter face all along. It was Urz’s words which made him make such a face.

---Tell the reason, huh. There is no way I can say it.

About the fact that he doubted the Zchted King Victor.

What Urz suggested, Ilda had also thought about it long ago. But, the enemy was Eugene whom the King chose as the next King.

Even if he appealed to him, the King would definitely cover up for Eugene. Even if he marched into Eugene's mansion, the result would not change that much.

Driven by such a doubt, Ilda hurriedly returned to his territory Bydgauche. This was because when he decided to attack Pardu which was Eugene's territory, he intended to settle things before King Victor intervened.

Ilda who returned to his camp called three subordinates in the tent for supreme commander use. As he made them prepare a table and a map, he told them that they would fight against the Lebus army.

"Against that Flash Princess of the ^{Isgri}Thunder Swirl...?"

Although the three subordinates were by no means cowardly, they shivered as if they were bathed in the night wind. Ilda laughed so as to ease their strain.

“It’s me who will fight against Vanadis-dono. You may rest assured.”

“Your Excellency, did you say that you will stand at the vanguard?”

One of the subordinates opened his eyes wide. He shook his head as he wanted to say that it was something outrageous.

“Your Excellency. Our purpose should only be Earl Pardu. If you can leave the fight against Vanadis-sama to us—”

“You guys have no chance of winning against Vanadis-dono.”

Interrupting the subordinate’s fervent speech, Ilda plainly said. However, his expression was serious.

“I don’t know whether or not even I can win. I’m confident in a sword fight, but...”

Elizavetta’s weapon was a whip, and a Dragon^{Viralt}ic Tool which only a Vanadis was allowed to wield. Even if it was wielded by her thin arm, it displayed power to

easily break a shield, cut a helmet and to blow off armor together with its contents.

Ilda's sword was a sword of steel which he placed an order to a blacksmith master, renown even in the Sachstein Kingdom. It was a hard sword whose blade would not be nicked even if it bisected an armor. Even so, considering that the opponent was Elizavetta, it did not look like he could be completely confident.

“Anyway, Vanadis-dono's opponent will be me. In return, I want you to devote yourself to commanding the soldiers.”

As one of the subordinates prepared a map, Ilda explained the plan.

“When midnight comes, we will leave the camp intact, and we will march towards the south — towards Pardu.”

Looking around at his subordinates' faces, Ilda continued.

“This will be a diversion. The Lebus army came in order to prevent us from going to Pardu. If we go towards the south, they will definitely move, too.”

The purpose of leaving the camp as is was so that the Bydgauche army would march under cover of night darkness while making the enemy think that they were still camping.

On the map, Ilda described an arc with a finger.

“When the Lebus army moves, we will make a big detour so as not to be noticed by them and we will sneak around behind them.”

“Do we launch a night attack?”

One of the subordinates let tension fill all over his face and stared at his lord. The Bydgauche army had marched throughout the night several times as part of their training. They were used to taking action within darkness.

But, Ilda shook his head.

“It is regrettable, but we will attack at daybreak.”

If possible, Ilda wanted to launch a night attack. However, the Bydgauche army was unfamiliar with the geography of the vicinity.

Aside of if it was only moving, when it came to attacking, it would be easy to create confusion. Especially a night attack, in a situation when they were uncertain of where they go, was more likely to fail. Let alone being found by the enemy and being repelled, stories about people who lost their way and met an accident or stories of self-destruction by killing each other by mistake were hardly few.

“Assuming that the first squad, second squad and third squad move separately, we will attack the Lebus army with two squads. The remaining squad will stand by as reserve forces.”

“Reserve forces?”

The subordinates frowned respectively. Ilda nodded with a difficult face.

“Earl Pardu’s army may appear in the middle of the battle. Besides, the enemy might not be limited only to the Lebus army and Earl Pardu’s army. Vanadis-dono said that 5000 soldiers were heading towards here, but...”

“Isn’t it a bluff in order to stop Your Excellency?”

Elizavetta's duty was to prevent Ilda from going to the territory of Pardu. Issuing a threat like "we have a large army" by such negotiations was an old trick.

"I think so too. But, I can't deny the possibility of reinforcement or a detached force, though the number 5000 is an exaggeration. Our purpose is, to the bitter end, Earl Pardu. Vanadis-dono and the Lebus army are powerful enemies, but I would like to carry out; if I can keep a military power, I would like to do it."

As if encouraging his subordinates, Ilda continued in a bright tone.

"Still, against the 1000 soldiers of the Lebus army, we will have 2000. While I draw Vanadis-dono's attention, you will defeat them. If the army is partially destroyed, even Vanadis-dono will withdraw."

The three subordinates bowed (in salutation) to their lord. Since Ilda decided as supreme commander how to fight, they only followed. Besides, they also had the pride that they would not lose against the Vanadis' army.

In order to advance the preparations of war, they left the tent at a quick pace. Since they would march at midnight, they had to let soldiers rest by turns without

delay. Other than, they were also a lot of things that they had to do.

Ilda who was now alone in the tent was quietly looking at the map on the desk.

When the moon rose high in the sky, the Bydgauche army promptly finished the preparations.

They braced horses with board and their hooves were also wrapped with clothes. They smeared armor and spear with dirt so as to prevent them from glittering by the moonlight. The soldiers had put on a dirtier overcoat on their dirty armors.

In addition, they had one long rope per every ten people. Since there was no light, they disarranged their formation and were walking while grasping a rope so as not to get lost.

Leaving a small number for a scouting party behind, a little less than 3000 soldiers moved. Several people were wistfully staring at the campfire which continued burning brightly.

Under the moon and starlight, the Bydgauche soldiers quietly walked through the meadow while pulling their horses. However much they walked, the moon and stars did not change their forms. The shadow of mountains seen in the far distance did not change, either.

The reins they held in their right hand and the feel of the rope which they grasped in the left hand. A dim breathing and footsteps were all that concerned them.

Whenever it counted five hundred soldiers, the Bydgauche army stopped once. Not to take a rest. But only to adjust their lines and quietly take a deep breath. And then, they advanced again.

It was not as if the lines were disordered so frequently. It was something which Ilda thought of in order to not paralyze the soldiers' senses within the night darkness.

When they repeated march and stoppage, and kept walking only a half koku while inserting rest. Near Ilda who was at the vanguard, a reconnaissance unit showed up with a report. They were on foot, but because the Bydgauche army's march was slow, they were able to catch up immediately.

“The Lebus army has begun to move.”

Ilda's eyes shone and were tinged with fighting spirit. But, he could not yet be pleased.

"Did they leave their camp?"

"No. It remains as it is."

---It can also be thought that they have noticed our movement and hurriedly ran after us without even moving out their camp but...

It might have been kept as is in order to make them think so.

"Anyway, the Lebus army has moved."

As Ilda stopped their march, he made them rest while also changing the formation. They had been advancing towards the south until then, but now they must head towards the northwest. It was the place where quite the confusion would arise if it was an army that was not used to moving within the darkness, but such a thing did not happen.

“We will raise the speed. After all, our bodies might have gotten warm and our eyes should have got used to darkness, too.”

Gradually drawing an arc, the Bydgauche army walked in the meadow. Spending nearly one koku, they arrived at the targeted place. It was the Lebus army’s camp.

Ilda first sent a reconnaissance unit to the Lebus army’s camp. At the same time, he prepared another reconnaissance unit and dispatched it to the south.

It was the reconnaissance unit which went towards the Lebus army’s camp that came back first. They reported that there were no soldiers in the camp.

“They seem to have moved without cleaning up anything; the fence around the camp is not removed and all the tents are also stretched as is. There are also many campfires which continued to burn.”

After that, the reconnaissance unit sent towards the south came back.

“I discovered the Lebus army marching. They are at a distance from about two Belsta in the south from here.”

Ilda looked up at the sky. The darkness which covered up the eastern sky was fading.

As he called his three subordinates, he ordered them to give a break of a quarter koku to the soldiers.

“Make then abandon any useless things and adjust the ranks. It’s almost dawn.”

Elizavetta saw through the fact that Ilda intended to attack them from the rear.

It was also in order to make the enemy think that they fell for the fact that they had let their camp as it is and gone towards the south at midnight. He told like that to the commander of each squad.

“The Bydgauche army will not take us head on. They will probably sneak around to our back. If they catch the enemy’s figure, they will turn around and intercept them. They will intend to go with such a plan.”

Therefore, when the eastern sky began to turn bright, even when she received the report that the Bydgauche army appeared behind her army, she was not surprised or did not panic. At least outwardly.

---I should say as expected of him.

She inwardly leaked a mutter and shiver. Even in the downtown that she knew by sight, her sense of direction and sense of distance went amiss when night came. If they moved in a large number of people, then all the more so.

They marched at midnight, in an area where they should have come to for only the first time, and arrived at their destination before the day broke. To Ilda who accomplished it, Elizavetta couldn’t help feeling admiration.

However, it was not time to feel admiration. She ordered the turning around to the whole army as planned. Elizavetta was standing at the army’s vanguard

and advancing her horse up to there, but due to the turning around, she found herself giving directions in the rear.

It was then that confusion occurred in the Lebus army.

Darkness made the soldiers' movement get out of order. Soldiers and horses collided here and there, and weapons and armors rubbed against each other. One pushed aside someone before him, and another thrust away the one who was behind. The voices appealing in pain and the sounds of falling to the ground occurred all over, the chorus of noises resounded through the meadows.

“Oh God...”

Elizavetta, amazed, stared at the disastrous scene before her eyes. Urz and Naum swallowed their voices with faces which turned pale. Though not to the extent of the Bydgauche army, the Lebus army should have also been used to move within the night darkness.

But, their formation now was greatly disordered and they were too preoccupied to think about the preparations for the battle.

On horseback, Elizavetta desperately gave instructions . Naum also sent the soldiers around as messengers and tried to settle the situation.

While feeling frustrated at himself who could not help those two people, Urz was silent at Elizavetta's side. He inwardly persuaded himself that he also had a duty. He should not do unnecessary things which could hinder her.

Within the darkness, the Lebus army somehow managed to rearrange their formation and finished their turning over. The ability of Elizavetta who rebuilt the formation in a short time was admirable, but the Bydgauche army had already approached immediately nearby.

In the meadow where darkness lurked, a lump of black horsemen shadows appeared letting the sound of horses' hooves roar. Ferocious battle cries blew about the cold wind before the daybreak.

Elizavetta looked back toward Urz.

“Urz, send the signal!”

As the youth nodded, he got Naum to help him and set fire to the three arrows which he had prepared. A cloth soaked with oil was wrapped on the sickle and blazed up with a popping sound.

It was the duty that Elizavetta gave to Urz.

As Urz tightly grasped the bow which he was carrying on his shoulder and nocked the fire arrows, he shot them one by one towards the sky. The fire arrows reached a surprising height, and disappeared while drawing a parabola and falling.

When the third fire arrow was shot in the empty sky, the Bydgauche army started attacking.

Tearing apart the gloomy atmosphere, hundreds of stones poured into the Lebus army like hail. It was stone-throwing by the Bydgauche army.

The stones were a size smaller than a clenched fist, but the sound which returned when they hit shields and helmets made the soldiers tense. Dozens of people crouched down as they received stones on their faces or hands, or they broke their posture and fell from their horses. Of course, the stone-throwing also attacked the

horses; the horses shook off their rider as they were surprised and horses which struggled in pain appeared one after another.

There, the Bydgauche soldiers who changed their weapon to spears charged.

Violent emotions and wild excitement superseded tension and fear. Spear and spear crossed, horse and horse collided, and angry roars and jeers flew about. The Lebus army endured the Bydgauche soldiers' strong charge. They held shield, stuck out spear, raised a roar and held their ground there while encouraging themselves.

To that impact, bloodshed continued. They thrust spear from a close range, beat with a shield, unsheathed sword and slashed. Horses collided with each other and made each opponent fall from his horse. The grass which covered the ground was stained with fresh blood before getting wet in the morning dew. The cold earth mercilessly took away heat from man and horse which fell in a heap.

What was driving them was not hatred or hostility. It was the enemy's whitish eyes, the sound of weapons and

cries as to hurt the ears. It was the weight of the sword or spear which they held in their hand, the neigh of horses and the smell of blood and mud. Those were madness generated as a whole.

The vanguards of both armies were jumbled together with enemy and ally, and it displayed the aspect of a melee. The Bydgauche army which inflicted the preemptive blow was not able to kick about the enemy, and the Lebus army which received their charge was not also able to force them back.

In a situation where the ebb and flow (seesawing) continued, a change occurred. As a detached force of the Bydgauche army appeared from the east and attacked the Lebus army's right side while raising a war cry.

This was the second squad of the Bydgauche army; they started moving after waiting for the first squad to open hostilities with the Lebus army. Though daybreak was near, the sky was still dark, to the point that one could not know the face of the person who was nearby, but it was possible to generally grasp the enemy's position by voice and sound.

The Lebus troops which found themselves being attack from two directions as expected fell into a numerical inferiority. Elizavetta had sensed such a change of the war situation even earlier than the messenger's report.

---As expected, he came with that move, huh.

The Bydgauche army had numerical superiority. The Vanadis of Rainbow Eyes^{Laziris} had anticipated that they would at least naturally divide their soldiers and attacked.

---Let's go, Valitsaif.

As she tightly grasped the black whip roundly bundled and hung on her waist, Elizavetta on horseback said.

"Naum, I leave the command to you."

"Master. I will also—"

The Flash Princess of the Thunder Swirl^{Isgriifa} shook her head and held back Urz who tried to ride his horse and follow her.

“You stay with Naum.”

When she finished saying it, Elizavetta advanced her horse between her allies. Urz unwillingly saw her off and shifted his attention to the distant battlefield. It felt a little bright even before the battle began, but even so the impression that black shadows were wriggling in the darkness did not change.

“Naum-san. I have a request.”

After a little thought, Urz called out to the grizzled knight as he made up his mind.

When she appeared in the space in which friend and foe was jumbled together, Elizavetta was already grasping the Thunder Swirl. In response to his master’s fighting spirit, the black whip wore a black light which harked back to lightning.

“—Vanadis!”

That was the last word of the Bydgauche soldier who shouted so. The whip of thunder which was mowed down blew off the Bydgauche soldier’s head along with

his helmet, spreading dark red blood mixed with gray matter in the thin air. Ignoring the body which fell to the ground, Elizavetta struck the Thunder Swirl towards the swarm of enemies.

The light danced boisterously and burnt the soldiers' eyes. Lightning ran through within the very dim light whenever Elizavetta let her whip flash, and the Bydgauche soldiers became bodies which no longer talked and fell down.

The Bydgauche soldiers attacked Elizavetta in twos or three, but the Vanadis' whip was much faster than their swords and spears. Moreover, it held destructive power to the extent that just by grazing the chin, the jaw was blown off from the mouth.

It smashed the head along with the helmet, blew off the arm along with the shield, crushed armor and knocked them down from the horseback. The whip freely changed its trajectory just like the pattern of lightning and there was no one who could avoid it. Let alone cut her, it was not easy even to stand in her way.

The Bydgauche soldiers were wrapped in a stir of shiver and fear, and the Lebus soldiers raised shouts of

joy. Elizavetta splendidly restored their morale which was about to collapse. It was indeed a Vanadis like activity.

Elizavetta was going to jump into the enemy's camp with that momentum, but there was a horseman's shadow which fiercely jumped out from among the Bydgauche soldiers earlier than that. Elizavetta stared wide-eyed.

“Duke Bydgauche!?”

That knight who set up his sword was unmistakably the supreme commander of the Bydgauche army Ilda. The flash of the Thunder Swirl that brushed away darkness and shone white was a sign of appearance for Ilda who aimed at Elizavetta.

Showing no signs of fear towards the Vanadis of ^{Laziris} Rainbow Eyes and the Thunder Swirl, Ilda drew his horse closer and let out a sharp slash with a cry of spirit.

“Iron Whip!”

In response to its master's cry, the whip in Elizavetta's hand changed to a rod-shaped weapon.

The Dragon^{Viralt}ic Tool and the hard sword clashed, sparks and flashes scattered. Both Elizavetta and Ilda instantly realized that the opponent before their eyes was a formidable enemy against whom they were not allowed even a moment of inattention.

Elizavetta dodged the sword thrust out aiming at her face by twisting her body. On the other hand, The Iron Whip wielded by Elizavetta was eluded by Ilda's sword.

Both of them not being able to deal an effective blow to the opponent, the exchange of strikes and slashes reached more than ten combinations. Although Elizavetta was superior in the weight of a blow, as expected Ilda was above in sword skill. Elizavetta switched her way of fighting to defense.

A color of the doubt flashed on the face of Ilda who noticed that.

Ilda's intent was to hold Elizavetta. This was because if he extracted the factor "Vanadis" and brought it into a battle between armies, the Bydgauche army would be advantageous with the number. A situation where a one-to-one fight would drag on was convenient for Ilda.

Elizavetta understood that, too. But, she also understood that showing an attitude of hurriedly settling the fight was what the opponent also expected.

At that time, battle cries suddenly arose in the western direction

“It’s an enemy!”

The shout which was similar to a scream was that of a Bydgauche soldier. The group of cavalrymen who appeared from the west sharply broke through the Bydgauche army’s right side. Ilda groaned low with a face which harbored a doubt (question).

“Were you waiting for this, Vanadis-dono?”

Elizavetta did not answer. There was no need to answer.

The identity of the group of cavalrymen who attacked the Bydgauche army’s right side was of course, the LeitMeritz army led by Ellen. More precisely, LeitMeritz

and Pardu allied troops. It was a group which consisted of about 1000 LeitMeritz cavalrymen and 30 Pardu cavalrymen.

Standing at the vanguard was the silver-haired Vanadis endowed with beauty and dignity.

After finishing the war council four days ago, Ellen sent a messenger to Eugene to explain the situation and borrow 30 cavalrymen. Afterwards, they regularly sent a messenger back and forth with the Lebus army and confirmed each other's positions, and exchanged information.

Ellen thought whether the Bydgauche army might have considerably approached Pardu, and they were trying not to be so far away from Pardu, her reading proved right.

It was at midnight that she was told by the messenger of the Lebus army that Elizavetta failed to persuade Ilda. Ellen accepted Elizavetta's request being that she wanted the LeitMeritz army to join in from the middle of the fight; Ellen left the camp as soon as Elizavetta conveyed the means of a signal and carefully advanced within the darkness.

When the battle began, the three fire arrows which Urz had shot towards the sky were the signal to Ellen's army lurking in the west of the battlefield. By the way, it was Ellen who had thought of this signal.

And now, the LeitMeritz army hung onto the Bydgauche army's flank.

Whenever the Silver Flash in Ellen's hand drew a white track in the very dim light, the Bydgauche soldiers fell from horses while being covered with their own blood, and never got up again.

Swinging her sword right and left, Ellen proudly advanced her horse while creating wind mixed with the spray of blood. The Bydgauche soldiers challenged her in high spirits, but none of them crossed blades more than twice with Ellen and fell off from the horseback as she cut them one after another.

The LeitMeritz soldiers and also the Pardu soldiers who jumped into the battlefield following her wielded sword and spear and knocked down the Bydgauche soldiers.

The LeitMeritz army broke through with a momentum like a storm, and at last greatly scooped out the side of the Bydgauche army's first squad.

“—Rurick.”

Without resting her hand wielding the Silver Flash, Ellen called the bald head knight. Rurick was also fighting as hard as his lord. The spearhead in his hands was dyed with blood and his armor got wet with the spurt of blood.

“I'll leave it to you for a while. Just be careful about the enemy's reserve forces.”

“Understood!”

Receiving Rurick's words with her back, Ellen sped along the battlefield while cutting down the enemies crowding around. Before long, she discovered Elizavetta's figure. The Dragon^{Viralt}ic Tool in Ellen's hand vaguely told her the position of Elizavetta's Dragon^{Viralt}ic Tool.

“Well done, Arifal.”

When looking, the red-haired Vanadis was unfolding a fierce battle with one knight. As Ellen brushed blood stained on her sword blade with one swing of the Silver Flash, she rode her horse.

Noticing the existence of Ellen who was approaching, Elizavetta and Ilda looked her way. The silver-haired Vanadis asked Ilda with a bright smile unbecoming to a battlefield.

“Are you Duke Bydgauche?”

“Yes, I am. And you? —A Vanadis?”

He caught on quickly. Ellen brightened her red eyes with fighting spirit and nodded in admiration.

“Lord of LeitMeritz. Eleanora Viltaria. Let me be your opponent.”

“You are that Wind Princess of the ^{Silvfrahl}Silverflash, huh. I have heard rumors.”

The last words were drowned out by the blades sounds. The collision of the two swords scattered sparks in the thin air and the swords blades reflected and

glittered it. A violent metallic sound struck the ears of the people who were there.

Finding out the presence of a powerful enemy before their eyes, both Ellen and Ilda stared wide-eyed. The darkness was getting thinner to the extent one could see each other expressions.

The Vanadis and the Duke made the bodies of their horses leap and exchanged strikes with drawn swords. Ellen's sword power was sharp like a gale and Ilda's slash was strong.

Elizavetta tried to assist Ellen, but she noticed that the battle formation of her allies collapsed in a distant place. The Bydgauche army's reserve forces — the third squad began to move.

Ellen also noticed the change in the enemy's movement. The red eyes and Rainbow ^{Laziris} Eyes met only for an instant.

“Go!”

“I leave here to you!”

The two girls' shouts were exactly at the same time. Elizavetta turned her back on Ellen and Ilda, raised her ^{Viralt} Dragonic Tool and rode her horse. Meanwhile, the offense and defense of Ellen and Ilda continued. Several silver hairs of Ellen danced down and a new crack was chopped on Ilda's armor.

The fight which seemed to drag on was however quickly settled.

Ilda's sword had broken from the middle of its length. The sword blade danced in the air while rotating and disappeared in the battlefield.

"It's a good sword."

While panting, Ellen sent words which were not ironical, but purely those of praise. He crossed with Elizavetta's Thunder Swirl, and then clashed with Ellen's Silver Flash. An ordinary sword would have shattered long ago.

Ellen was about to thrust the tip of the Silver Flash at Ilda, but an unexpected hindrance broke in here. From the flank, a Bydgauche soldier raised a spear and attacked Ellen.

“Your Excellency, please escape!”

It was not only one. Other Bydgauche soldiers broke in between the Vanadis and the Duke, and built up a thick wall of flesh and iron. There were also those who went towards Ellen with the force of bumping their horses into her.

Ellen reluctantly wielded the Silver Flash and cut down the Bydgauche soldier, but while becoming covered with blood, they stretched their hands to the silver-haired Vanadis and clung to her horse’s leg even when falling on the ground and tried to block the horse’s movement.

“What great loyalty.”

As Ellen muttered with irritation, she challenged them and mercilessly killed the enemies who stood in her way. But, when she ensured the freedom of her movements, Ilda was far away.

Looking around at the battlefield, the Bydgauche troops were collapsing everywhere. They were eagerly holding their ground, but it was a matter of time.

“It looks like I did well to leave it to Rurick.”

Ellen kicked the horse’s belly and went after Ilda.

Ilda, protected by his soldiers, returned to the Bydgauche army’s second squad, but even here, he was advised by his subordinate to escape.

“Your Excellency. We will apply to you about ten horsemen as escorts. Please escape while we are holding them back.”

“Don’t say stupid things!”

As expected, Ilda’s complexion changed and he shouted.

“It’s me who brought you until here. If we are to withdraw, it’s to me to give that order...”

“If you die, you will not be able to prove your justice. If you return to Bydgauche, then you will be able to prepare new soldiers. Please, for now consider your life.”

The subordinate was stubborn and did not also yield. He was desperate, too. The terrifying fact that there were two Vanadis, mentally cornered the Bydgauche army.

If they did not let their lord escape here, the doubt that they might definitely come to kill him was swirling in their minds. After all, Ilda had already shaken off the hand which Elizavetta held out.

“Your Excellency. Although it is hard to say, our troops are outnumbered.”

The first squad was wounded all over by the LeitMeritz army and the second squad also retreated repeatedly, unable not endure the Lebus army’s offensive . As for the third squad of reserve forces, they supported the second squad and were desperate to hold back its (second squad) collapse.

Even so, it was the screams of soldiers he heard from a distant place that made Ilda who was still reluctant give up.

“Enemy in the rear!”

Ilda and his subordinates gasped almost at the same time. The enemy was not only the Lebus army and the LeitMeritz army. Even the Duke in his prime finally compromised (yielded).

Since he had lost his favorite hard sword, Ilda said while receiving a spare sword.

“Listen. When you see that I have seceded from the battlefield, surrender immediately.”

“I understand. After all, I also don't intend to die in a place like this.”

Under an ultramarine sky, Ilda seceded from the battlefield with ten horsemen.

The ground was still dark even though dawn would break soon, and the battlefield was still in maelstrom of angry roars and screams. As he succeeded in escaping safely under their cover, Ilda immediately noticed the presence of people who came chasing him.

Within the very dim light, many flames seemed to be torches were flickering.

When they were going to hurry their horse, they heard the sound of arrows which approached cutting the wind.

It sounded like an awfully fresh sound. This was because both armies did not use bow and arrow in this battle. In the first place, the Bydgauche army did not prepare bow and arrow in order to reduce their baggage, and the Lebus army was too preoccupied to use the bow and arrow. The LeitMeritz army also refrained from using bow and arrow for fear of hitting friendly troops.

An arrow pierced through the horse of the Bydgauche soldier next to Ilda. The horse neighed in pain and turned sideways while throwing up (off) the rider to the ground. Three other cavalymen fell from their horses as they were caught in it.

Ilda who looked back by moving only his head felt a chill down his spine. Did the arrow just now hit by chance, or did it hit what it was aimed at?

There was a distance of 300 Belsta (about 300 meter) between them and the group of torches which were chasing them. Furthermore, there was no way that the aim would be determined (good) as both groups were riding horses. It should have only hit luckily.

But, Ilda was not able to suppress his fear and tension. He felt like the archer who was among the group of torches was aiming at his back.

As they held the same feelings, the remaining six horsemen turned their horses.

“Your Excellency. We will hold them back. In the meantime, please...!”

At this time, Ilda tried to stop them as he felt a sense of incongruity. But, the cavalrymen uttered their voices earlier and went towards the pursuers.

A second arrow came flying and immediately after, it pierced the buttocks of Ilda’s horse.

The horse stood erect due to the sudden pain and Ilda’s view raced. During an instant when he was thrown off from the horse, the Duke in his prime noticed the real nature of his sense of incongruity.

Why did only one arrow come flying? Was it because there was only one person who could fly an arrow to this distance? The best hand in this case was to scatter the seven people including him, was the enemy not perplexed by this?

Being flung against the ground from horseback, Ilda groaned. Although he rose immediately, the sounds of horseshoes approached before he could even advance ten steps. He was surrounded.

“Duke Bydgauche, right?”

The youth standing in front of Ilda called out to him in a voice with a Brune accent. He remembered him. It was the youth who was at the time of the discussion with Elizavetta.

“Master... Could you come to Vanadis-sama’s place?”

That youth who tightly grasped a bow in his hand was Urz.

What Urz requested to Naum was to borrow 30 horsemen. He thought that one horseman should hang up two torches with the intent to disturb the enemy by appearing behind him.

“In this situation, 30 horsemen are precious, you know? Besides, if something was to happen to you, I might be strangled to death by Vanadis-sama.”

Naum prepared 30 horsemen while scratching his grizzled head about and sighing.

And, Urz made a great detour to the east side of the battlefield appearing behind the Bydgauche army's second squad. As he confirmed that the enemy was confused, Urz was about to pull out, but he changed his mind after seeing about ten horsemen shadows rushing from the Bydgauche army.

The Bydgauche army had not yet reached the state of rout. The enemy withdrawing the battlefield in this situation was limited.

“...And then, he said that when he caught him later on, it was a long shot.”

While hearing Naum's report, Elizavetta's eyes were turned to the battlefield.

The Lebus soldiers who received her instructions were running the battlefield while crying out that they caught Ilda as a prisoner.

Mixed with the sounds of weapons, those words gradually reached the ears of the Bydgauche soldiers. One, another one threw away their swords, spears, and there were those who went down from their horses and surrender.

While looking at the spectacle, Elizavetta said to Naum beside her.

“Honestly, I’m lost at whether I should scold him or praise him.”

“If you want to scold someone, please scold me. But, could you please praise Urz?”

“There is no way I can do that.”

Elizavetta made a sour face and turned her face away from Naum. After a pause, she asked.

“Do you think that it was just lucky?”

“Even if I were to do to the same thing as Urz, to surprise the enemy will be the utmost I could do.”

Naum answered indifferently. He was not being humble, it was a fact.

Even Ilda’s subordinate carefully considered so that his lord might not be caught by the enemy, and let him escape. Both Ellen and Elizavetta did not notice that Ilda had left the battlefield. Even for Urz and the others who discovered Ilda, they could not catch up only with horses.

“Forgive my way of saying it, but he is a monster in bow skill.”

Urz was able to succeed precisely because of the bow and arrow in his hand.

What marked the end of the battle was when the sun show up.

The Bydgauche army had a little less than 400 deceased and the number of injured people was the double that number. On the other hand, the deceased of

the Lebus army and LeitMeritz were less than 100, respectively. However, there were a lot of injured people. This was because there was the melee in the darkness and there were many people who fell down and were trampled down by enemy or ally during that melee.

The three armies respectively build their camp and were busy with the burial of the deceased and medical care of injured people.

And in the tent the use of supreme commander of the Lebus army, Ellen and Ilda were facing each other.

“I give you my greetings once again, Duke Bydgauche. I am the Vanadis Eleanora Viltaria of LeitMeritz.”

The silver-haired Vanadis courteously bowed as salutation to Ilda. Next to her, Elizavetta made a wary face. Since Ellen insisted, she let her meet Ilda before her presence, but she was not able to wipe the anxiety about what Ellen intended to say.

Although Ilda was not tied with a rope, his weapons up to his dagger were taken away, and he was not wearing armor, either. A smile without hostility was floating into his face. Since he was defeated, he intended to behave graciously and fairly.

“Sorry for my discourtesy in the battlefield. I am Ilda Krutis and was granted the territory of Bydgauche by His Majesty. Eleanora-dono. Your sword skill was more than what the rumors say.”

“I am grateful. By the way, Duke. I wanted to ask, but why did you move your soldiers? If it is someone of you caliber, it would have been fine if you had lodged a complaint to His Majesty the King.”

It was exactly the same question that Urz threw at him last night. Ilda gave a sarcastic smile.

“I am sorry, but you will not hear any answer from my mouth. However, it will be clarified sooner or later.”

“...Duke. I will say this knowing that it might get you angry, but as far as I know, Earl Pardu is not someone who would do something mean. I am not saying that I want you to understand, but I want you to know only the fact that I am thinking that way.”

It was as to declare that if Ilda intended to attack Pardu someday again, she would become his opponent.

As for Ellen, she intended to protect Eugene depending on his interaction, but if it backfired, she would judge and change her policy.

The Vanadis' military fame would be enough to keep the other party in check.

“Is Vanadis-done close to Earl Pardu?”

“He is a benefactor.”

“Understood. I will keep that in mind.”

Without being perturbed by Ellen's immediate reply, Ilda deeply nodded. As if to say “I will be careful next time”.

After having buried the deceased at the foot of the hill, Ellen left Ilda and the Bydgauche army to Elizavetta and parted from them.

“Won’t you meet Earl Pardu?”

Ellen proposed just in case, but Elizavetta shook her head.

“Unlike you, I am suspicious of the Earl. Besides, I came here only to stop Duke Bydgauche.”

“Understood. But, I will tell the Earl about you.”

As Ellen said so, Elizavetta snorted in displeasure and left with the Lebus army and the Bydgauche army. Ellen quietly saw off her retreating figure.

Afterwards, while giving instructions to vacate the camp, Ellen gathered approximately 30 applicants from the soldiers. In the place where she finished preparations for withdrawal, the silver-haired Vanadis called Rurick.

“Rurick, I will go to report to Earl Pardu. I have to return the borrowed soldiers. Go back to LeitMeritz with the other soldiers.”

When they entered the Pardu territory, the soldiers following her were so many that they would make a beholder become anxious. Today, there was just a bloody battle.

In addition, from here she had to stop by Litomyšl where Eugene was, and moreover she also had to prepare food for the soldiers while returning to the Imperial Palace of LeitMeritz. It was better that she took only the minimum number of soldiers, and that the remaining soldiers quickly returned.

“...Understood.”

After Rurick answered so, he stared at his lord's face with a face which wanted to say something. But, he probably thought “shouldn't we talk about that story now?”. He did not say anything.

Chapter 3 – Departure

In the city Litomyšl which was in the center of Pardu, there was Eugene's mansion.

At noon two days after the battle against Ilda, Ellen arrived at this town. She was accompanied by thirty of her horsemen and the thirty horsemen she borrowed from Eugene. Even if there were injured among the Pardu soldiers, there were no dead.

Litomyšl was a town which gave the impression of a simple rural area.

There were many wooden houses standing in a row; they were made using plaster so that they could endure the cold. Only the main street, which connected from Eugene's mansion which was in the back to the outside of the town, was paved with cobblestones, but the other roads were the ones where the earth was thrust and hardened.

It was not for the lord's vanity that only the main street was paved with cobblestones. It was provided for when a visitor would come by horse or carriage.

A wide river was flowing from the north of the town to the east and on fine days, stalls lined up along the river and sold fish, nuts and edible wild plants, but those stands did not turn up today.

It was because the residents who should be the shoppers thronged on both sides of the main street.

They had rarely seen a total amount of sixty cavalrymen. Moreover, moving at their vanguard was one of the only seven Vanadis in Zchted. Looking around , almost all the residents of the town had gathered.

This was also the reason why Ellen narrowed down the cavalrymen she would bring along to thirty. If there were more LeitMeritz soldiers than the Pardu soldiers, the residents would probably not have shown up. By taking the same number, it was necessary to direct impartiality by lining them right and left.

“It’s been a long time since I come here, but...”

While advancing her horse at the vanguard, and responding to the voices and cheers of the residents by waving her hand, Ellen turned her gaze around to the scenery of Litomyšl.

---It's somehow similar to the town of Celesta.

Celesta was the town in the center of Alsace where Tigre was born and raised, his mansion was there too. Of course, the cityscape was completely different from that of Litomyšl, but there was something common in the atmosphere which drifted in the town.

Behind Ellen, the soldiers of LeitMeritz and Pardu looked the other way awkwardly as they were vigorously waving their hands. On anyone's face, there was conceit and the pride that they protected this place.

Eugene was standing in front of his mansion. With a slender face, he grew a gray, long beard under his chin. He wrapped his small skinny body in loose hempen clothes.

Ellen stopped her horse in front of Eugene and quickly went down. Eugene was looking at Ellen with a gentle smile. There were dark circles under his eyes.

---He has become a little haggard.

“Well, it's no wonder” Ellen thought. After all, he was suspected to have poisoned Ilda's attendant and he had

his territory attacked by a large army. Although the Bydgauche army was repelled by Ellen and Elizavetta, it was not as if everything was settled.

Ellen intentionally made a bright smile and bowed to her teacher of etiquette.

“Eugene-dono, it’s been a long time.”

“Ellen, no, sorry. Vanadis-dono. I caused you trouble.”

Eugene also stepped up to Ellen and held her hand. The hand of the Earl who passed 40 years old was dry and warm.

The horsemen lined up in the courtyard of Eugene’s mansion. Eugene first expressed politely, words of thanks to the LeitMeritz soldiers, and told that he prepared lodgings and meal for them. After that, he thanked the soldiers of his army, promised them a reward and made them disperse.

Afterwards, he invited Ellen in his mansion.

It was a two-storied mansion whose exterior was plain, but when passing through the door, many vivid tapestries were decorated on the walls. Expensive jars and marble statues were placed in the corridor.

These were various articles given to Eugene as presents when he was serving as King Victor's close aide. There also seemed to be some things among them that were given by King Victor, but Eugene did not explain which articles they were.

Ellen had asked before; whether it would not be better to put them away if there were so important. However, Eugene shook his head with the face of a teacher who admonished a pupil.

“There's no mistaking it that they gave them to me hoping that I will value them. But, there is no way that they gave them to me with the thought of wanting me to put them away. They would be pleased to see that I use them as decorations.”

After saying so, Eugene concluded it by saying that this was also one courtesy.

“Viltaria-sama. It has been a long time.”

It was Eugene's wife, and daughter who welcomed Ellen as she entered the mansion.

Eugene's wife, though not as much as her husband, was also slim. She wrapped her body in clothes with long cuffs and revealed a kind smile which harked back to the spring sunlight filtering through foliage. This woman was King Victor's niece.

“It has been a long time, Viltaria-sama!”

Eugene's daughter who was standing beside her mother cheerfully greeted Ellen and deeply bowed her head. It looked like she was so energetic she could not help herself. Though she was wearing long sleeve clothes and a long skirt up to her feet, they let one feel wonder and liveliness, and there was the brightness of a strong will within her eyes.

Ellen gently stroked her head.

“I heard from your father. He said that you want to be like me and do sword training.”

The daughter who would be 13 years old this year raised her face, happily nodded and tightly grasped both her hands before her chest.

“Yes! Viltaria-sama, could you someday teach me?”

“Let’s see. If you still worked hard in sword training even after three years, then okay.”

“Viltaria-dono is tired. Do not talk so much about such absurdity.”

Eugene chided his daughter, and then he looked back towards Ellen.

“I would like you to rest first in a room. I will immediately ask to prepare meal and hot water.”

The served meal was rice porridge (Kasha) in which a small amount of butter and salmon were put in, chicken baked in a covered pan with herbs, an omelet with cheese put in and a soup of potatoes and carrots.

They let steam rise on the oak table. It might not be extravagant, but any one of those dishes would allow one to feel much warmth, and Ellen inwardly took a breath of relief.

If Eugene had arranged on the table dishes which commanded praises, Ellen would have rather worried about him.

When finishing eating, Eugene made the servant prepare wine and honey wine (Medovukha), and then asked him to leave. Only Ellen and Eugene were now alone in the dining room. The wine was for Ellen.

First of all, Ellen talked about this incident. She began to explain from when a messenger from the royal palace visited LeitMeritz, her joining with the Lebus army led by Elizavetta, to when they captured the Duke in his prime after a battle with the Bydgauche army which he commanded.

“In order to bury the deceased, we borrowed the foot of the hill.”

“I am sorry, Ellen. For not having talked about the details.”

In a private place, Eugene also called the silver-haired Vanadis, Ellen. Ellen confirmed that her teacher of etiquette had not changed, and she secretly thought that it was a good thing.

“There seem to be serious circumstances, did something happen? Lord Ilda said that I will know of it sooner or later.”

At Ellen’s question, Eugene narrowed his eyes and frowned. He put his hand on his long gray beard and dropped his look on the table.

To the silence which fell, Ellen patiently endured. It was only when the time of a full 100 counts had passed, that Eugene opened his mouth.

“Originally... originally, it isn’t something that I should say to anyone. I didn’t even say it to my wife and my daughter. That’s why I could not also write it in a letter. But—”

Eugene moved his gaze which was focusing on the table to the bottle of wine, and then stared straight at Ellen.

“There is only you and I here. Besides, say what you want, but this Pardu was saved by you. The territory, the people, my wife and daughter too... However, I would like you to keep it secret.”

---Seems like an extreme emphasis.

While thinking so, Ellen nodded.

Ellen and Eugene were the only people here; the servants had not approached the dining room by their master's order. Nevertheless, Eugene lowered his voice.

Although Ellen knitted her brows, she heard the words which came out from the mouth of the Earl of slim figure, and she was astonished. As she unintentionally raised her voice, she hurriedly shut her mouth, gulped down the wine in her silver cup at a stretch and somehow settling her feelings, she confirmed in a voice as low as Eugene's earlier.

“Eugene-dono will be the next King...?”

Eugene nodded with a tired face. As expected, even Ellen was not able to return a smart reaction to this. A person close to her, though it would be at some future time, would become King.

After about ten seconds passed, she finally said with a shaking voice.

“That’s, what to say… Congratulations, to you.”

“Thank you.”

Eugene lonely laughed. As he picked up the bottle of wine, he poured it into Ellen’s silver cup which became empty. He poured honey wine into his cup. While Ellen expressed her thanks and received the silver cup, she wonderingly tilted her head to the side.

“You are fairly calm about it, Eugene-dono.”

“It has already been one month since I got those words from His Majesty after all.”

Ellen consented, and then thought of a certain thing.

“Is it the reason why Duke Bydgauche aimed at you, Eugene-dono?”

It was probably because the shock of Eugene’s confession was too great that she could not immediately remember it despite having thought of it once. Eugene returned a question with a difficult face.

“It’s also what I would like to know. Due to this matter, I have to leave for the royal capital by the day after tomorrow at the latest. Hasn’t Lord Ilda said anything else?”

Ellen shook her head. She had told him everything about her conversation with Ilda at the beginning. Even though she explored her memory, there was no leak.

“I am sorry for not being able to help.”

“No, I also keep on depending on you regarding this time. If I knew that something like this would happen, I would have done a little more sword training.”

“But, Eugene-dono. People are cut out for certain things and not other things.”

Saying so, Ellen teasingly laughed. Being enticed in it, Eugene also laughed.

“You’re quite right. It was quite the uphill battle to teach you the etiquette of the royal court.”

“Yeah. Therefore, please leave the sword training to me.”

“Thanks. By the way, Eleanora.”

Eugene changed the topic. With the look of a teacher watching over his pupil, he gently asked.

“Haven't you have some kind of trouble or anything?”

Ellen stared wide-eyed as she was taken aback. To Ellen who made a face saying “how did you figure it out?”, Eugene gave a gentle smile.

“Unlike Limlisha, it’s easy to guess it by looking at your face. If you’re fine with me, I can give advice.”

Limlisha was Ellen’s reliable adjutant and also a precious friend. She was currently guarding the Imperial Palace of LeitMeritz in her master’s absence. She was also a pupil who learned etiquette under Eugene.

“—No, I’m grateful for your concern alone.”

Ellen politely turned down her teacher’s offer. Eugene also did not try to tread on any further. However, he was worried about his pupil.

“I don’t know what troubles you, but please do not overdo it. You are still young.”

“Thank you.”

Ellen thanked him once again.

The next day, Ellen gathered her soldiers and left Litomyšl. As she went through the highway to the west, she planned to return straight to LeitMeritz.

Eugene accompanied her up to the town’s gate to see her off.

“Stay in good health, Eleanora.”

“You, too, Eugene-dono. Take care.”

“You do not need to worry about me. Ellen. You may think that I am obstinate, but I will not do anything reckless.”

As she bowed on horseback to her teacher's concern, Ellen gave an order to the soldiers. The LeitMeritz army orderly left Litomyšl.

They returned to the Imperial Palace of LeitMeritz seven days later.

Elizavetta who managed the Lebus army parted from Ilda who led the Bydgauche army at the spot where the highway divided which extended respectively to the north and the west. Advancing on the highway extending to the north, one would arrive at the capital Silesia in about three days. Taking the highway extending to the west would lead to Lebus or Legnica.

“I was thinking that you will definitely take us until the capital.”

A few days had passed since the battle and Ilda had regained his composure. Although defeated, he did not hold a grudge against Elizavetta and Ellen.

“Ilda-sama, if you believe in your righteousness then this should be enough, right? You will probably be punished for having moved your soldiers without getting His Majesty’s permission, but afterwards, you should dignifiedly assert your viewpoint.”

Though it was a severe way of speaking, Ilda was rather pleased with it and laughed.

“What Vanadis-dono says is quite right. Besides, I must accept my defeat. For my soldiers, too.”

He should head to the royal palace as the obligation of the loser and receive judgment. For this Duke with a militaristic disposition, it seemed reasonably easy to grasp that way of thinking.

As the Bydgauche army following him was thinking the same thing, most of them did not show a rebellious attitude. However, they tried not to break only their firm attitude.

There was also the fact that Elizavetta had firmly forbidden quarrel between soldiers, but even if there was small squabbles between the Lebus army and the Bydgauche army until today, big troubles had not occurred. Even those squabbles immediately settled down.

“I am grateful to you for having brought us up to here. —Oh yeah. I forgot to say one thing.”

Ilda continued with a carefree smile.

“Vanadis-dono, you have a really skilled archer. I thought that I could succeed in escaping at that time, but it was a terrible conceit on my part. Even among my subordinates, there’s no owner that possesses that much skill.”

Falling from his horse because of that archer and regardless of what the present situation was, Ilda, without expressing any grudge, purely praised Urz as a warrior. Elizavetta, rather than joyfully considering it, bowed her head small with regrettable feelings.

“Thank you. I will tell the person himself. It’s a great honor.”

And Ilda led the Bydgauche army and went ahead through the highway leading to the capital.

“Was it all right?”

Naum who was immediately behind Elizavetta asked.

“There is no reason for me to go all the way up to the capital.”

About the details of the battle against Ilda, she had already sent a messenger to the capital a few days ago. So, she had nothing more to report.

Even if Ilda didn't go to the capital, either he would return to his territory Bydgauche or he would flee; and in this case, Elizavetta would bear the responsibility. But she decided to trust the Duke in his prime.

For one thing, if she were to accompany Ilda until the capital like that, there were circumstances which would cause her return to Lebus to be delayed up to six days. She had already been absent for nearly twenty days. If possible, she did not want to stop on the way.

Elizavetta slightly twisted her body on horseback and turned her gaze to the back as she quietly took a glance.

Behind her, needless to say that there was not only Naum, but also Urz.

This youth did not boast of his achievements even after the battle, and was striving for his work as an attendant. It seemed like there was no particular change, but she felt that the frequency in which he exchanged jokes with Naum increased. In addition, according to Naum, there seemed to be several soldiers who wanted to exchange a friendly chat with him.

“—Urz”

Called by Elizavetta, Urz drew his horse near while cocking his head in puzzlement.

“Is something the matter?”

Not answering immediately, Elizavetta fixedly stared at Urz.

If she was really thinking about Urz, she should have several people escort him and send him to the capital.

Or, she should herself go to the royal palace accompanied by him?

She could hear such a voice in the innermost depths of her heart.

There was no clear evidence, but there was no doubt that Urz was definitely Tigrevurmud Vorn.

*---No, it may be a different person. What matters is **that** “clear evidence”. Wasn’t even Eleanora unable to show it? It’s surely a different person. Urz is Urz.*

While eagerly persuading herself, Elizavetta opened her mouth.

“Bring your horse a little nearer.”

“Yea”, Urz issued such an idiotic voice and advanced his horse.

The Vanadis of Rainbow Eyes ran her gaze at the surroundings. No soldiers were looking her way. Even Naum turned to the back as he was concerned about something.

Elizavetta said with a smile.

“Ilda-sama has greatly praised your bow skill.”

“I-Is that so?”

Urz revealed a mixed smile as he was troubled and embarrassed. Since it was him who made Ilda fall from his horse, it was difficult to be frankly pleased.

“You should be proud. It's really rare for that person to praise someone about military arts after all. So — I will reward you. Lower your head.”

While saying so, Elizavetta advanced her horse next to Urz's horse. To Urz who lowered his head wonderingly, she stretched out her hand.

She touched his darkish red head and gently stroked it like a parent does to his child.

Elizavetta did so probably for about ten seconds. She then removed her hands, her cheeks bright red.

“I-It's fine already.”

Urz who raised his head stared at his master like always with a wondering face as a little while ago. He made an expression as if thinking about something, and then revealed an expression showing that he understood finally.

“Thank you.”

As expected it took him time to realize that her stroking his head was the reward. As for Elizavetta who was thanked, she turned away her face which was bright red until her ears. At that time, her eyes met those of Naum who was looking her way with an amazed face.

It goes without saying that she called Naum later and told him to keep it a secret.

Several days later, the Lebus army returned safely.

It was exactly at the time when Elizavetta parted from Ilda that the Vanadis Valentina Glinka Estes requested an audience with the Zighted King in the royal palace of the capital Silesia.

It was the evening of that day that King Victor received Valentina in the audience room.

In the room, besides King Victor and Valentina, there was only the Grand Chamberlain. But, ten imperial guards were on standby outside the audience room. On the call of either the King or the Grand Chamberlain, they would jump in immediately.

Clad in luxurious silk clothes which abundantly used gold and silver threads, the King sat down on the throne.

Valentina went down on a knee before the King. She, who held the nickname of Illusory Princess of the Hollow Shadow^{Shervid}, was the eldest along with Sophia Obertas among the Vanadis.

Raven black hair long enough to reach her waist. A pure white dress wrapped around her delicate body. Roses which were displayed on her hair and dress, and a calm demeanor coupled with a transient beauty, her figure was not a rare sight alike to secluded princesses which meant that she had been brought up with tender care, having a neat and clean atmosphere.

What was mysterious was the long-handled scythe which was placed near her. It was colored deep crimson and jet black and had a huge blade which was as curved as her body was.

If such a scythe was next to her, she should have left nothing but a sense of incongruity as if the gears did not mesh if you think about normally. But, this scythe succeeded in the fact that it gave a fairytale-like atmosphere to Valentina.

It might be because this scythe called Hollow Shadow was her Dragon^{Viralt}ic Tool.

The King's stern gaze was turned not to Valentina, but to that Dragon^{Viralt}ic Tool.

Originally, the possession of weapons was firmly forbidden in the audience room. Let alone a dagger, even one needle if speaking of extremes. If it was found, execution might be announced on the spot.

But, there was only one exception in Zchted. It was a Vanadis' Dragon^{Viralt}ic Tool.

It was said that only this might be carried in the audience room. It did not change since the time the Zchted Kingdom was created. And it had never been changed, either.

“I sincerely express you my gratitude as a retainer for having permitted an audience.”

In a position where she was on her knees and hung her head down, Valentina calmly said.

“I have heard about Duke Bydgauche and Earl Pardu.”

“Both of them are loyal vassals, but did something happen?”

The old King who exceeded the age of 60 feigned ignorance with a splendor as to be dumbfounded for someone who knew of the circumstances. Similarly, the complexion of the Grand Chamberlain next to him did not change one bit. Valentina chuckled in a way that was not visible to the King and the Grand Chamberlain.

“This time, Duke Bydgauche moving his soldiers and heading to Pardu because there was poison in the alcohol Earl Pardu sent to the Duke, and that the Duke’s attendant who drank it lost his life, something like that.”

“If it is about the duty to stop Duke Bydgauche, then I have already ordered it to others.”

“It is not about that, that I would like to speak of.”

Valentina raised her face. Sincerity and seriousness were overflowing in her lovely features. However, the old King showed no particular signs of being impressed. Not even one of the wrinkles which formed his face quivered.

“I would like to act as a mediator between the Duke and the Earl.”

“I cannot allow that.”

With a curt tone, King Victor turned down the black-haired Vanadis’ wish.

“You may be close to Duke Bydgauche. Since Osterode which thou rules is near Bydgauche. But, I do not think you have interactions of great significance with Earl Pardu. That being the case, there will be deflection in your judgment.”

“Of course, I will be of course partial in my judgment. However, Your Majesty. In this case, do you know what is important for a mediator?”

“...What, do you say you know?”

“I know why Earl Pardu sent alcohol to Duke Bydgauche.”

For a moment, the audience room fell silent as if it struck water. Several wrinkles carved in King Victor’s face slightly moved and his eyes emitted a whitish light.

“Earl Pardu is Duke Bydgauche’s brother-in-law. So it is not particularly strange for him to send alcohol to a relative.”

“It is me who recommended the Earl to send the Vodka.”

Valentina lowered her head once again.

“All the more that something like that happened is regrettable and unbearable for me”

The old King was overlooking her black hair with eyes harking back to a cold swamp during winter.

“Raise your face.”

The old King’s words were uttered after a short pause. Valentina raised her face.

“You will act as mediator. Duke Bydgauche and Earl Pardu are two people that are indispensable to our country. Above all, the mediator would have to do more than just hear both sides’ stories. You, who have a weak constitution, may not be able to go through with it though.”

The latter half of his lines was clearly sarcasm. However, Valentina did not change her complexion one bit. She was not a Vanadis to be shaken by this much.

“Then, at least, could you allow me to be present?”

“You should do as you like.”

“I have not enough words to expression my gratitude to your kindness.”

Like this, the audience ended.

Valentina who left the audience room lost herself in thought while walking down the corridor of the royal palace with her scythe on her shoulder.

---It looks like I can't hope for confusion more than this in the current situation. But, since I was able to able to get permission to attend as mediator, I will settle with this for the time being.

Earl Pardu and Duke Bydgauche. The next King and the man who would support him. She was able to have a positive point of contact with these two people.

---What is left is to know to what extent I'm being suspected by His Majesty... I really have no idea about this. But there is no doubt that he definitely suspected me.

It was Valentina who poisoned the Vodka. But, it was not as if she did it directly.

Valentina's Dragon^{Viralt}ic Tool was endowed with a power with which it was possible to move from space to space, but she had never used that power for such a plotting up to now.

There was a more simple method. She bribed an employee of Ilda's mansion.

Valentina had grasped the living habits of people in the capital with high rank in the rights of succession to

the throne. From where their mansion was in the capital, how many employees were working there, to where the shops they frequently visited were.

Of course, she thoroughly knew also about the people who were working at Ilda's mansion.

She had an eye on one person among them that was not that much liked by Ilda and that could be moved with money, and proposed to him a talk. Of course, Valentina did not meet him directly, but through many other people acting as intermediates.

The poison was not put in the alcohol. It was applied on a cup. Ilda might not necessarily die in this way of doing, but it did not matter for Valentina.

This was because her purpose was not to murder Ilda, but to cause confusion and then obtain an advantageous position therein.

By the way, that employee was no longer in the capital . He received a sack packed with gold coin and disappeared.

---At any rate, Ilda-sama's action was unexpected.

Valentina had thought that Ilda would certainly fly in rage, but still that he would settle it in the royal palace. She intended to enter there as a mediator and make both of them owe her.

*---Since there should have trouble at least until the
Maslenitsa
Sun Festival, I will do with this for the time being.*

She passed through the corridor and went to the pillared corridor where one could view the garden. Valentina stopped, shifted her attention to the garden. Though there were few types of flowers due to it being wintertime, even so, Primula and snowdrops and ^{podснеžnik} multicolored flowers were blooming with colors such as white and purple. It was a pleasurable sight to the eyes of the beholder.

Valentina sat down on one of the benches set up in the garden. As she let a smile spread on her lips and gazed at the flowers, the young woman brought up pure and innocent looked like she was enjoying the beauty of flowers. But, what was in her head were not the flowers.

---If possible, I want it to divide in two or three. Like Brune last year and Asvarre was until the other day.



Valentina's thought was not that original of a thing. Create an opposition in the country, so that it's divided in two or three factions, and then seize the initiative therein. She would then hold power in such a way and finally take over the throne.

She managed to create an opposition. It seemed to have settled in the meantime, but both Duke Bydgauche and Earl Pardu respectively had friends and supporters. Even if the persons themselves wanted tranquility, their surroundings would rise of their own accords and there were a number of examples on how they could create confusion.

---Still, if Prince Ruslan were there, all this would not have happened.

Valentina suddenly drove her thoughts into the past.

King Victor had a son named Ruslan. He was knowledgeable about both political and military affairs, and it was said that he was a wise prince in whom the chief vassals had a deep trust. King Victor also loved this prince.

However a few years ago, the prince suddenly suffered from heart disease. He set fire on the royal villa on the outskirts of the royal palace. Several days later, Ruslan was confined in a certain shrine under the pretext of medical treatment for his illness.

After Valentina became Vanadis, she had happened to see Ruslan only once. It was about when she happened to pass by near the shrine where the Prince was confined.

He was in his mid-thirties. His pale golden hair grew very long and the lower half of his face was covered with a stubbly beard.

The first-class clothes which he was wearing became slovenly worn out, and though he wore a leather shoe on his right foot, his left foot was bared. Upon close inspection, he had refined features, but his eyes were not focused on anything, his mouth which discharged a disharmonious singing was half-opened and saliva was streaming down his chin.

He was walking around the shrine with such a figure. With steps like a drunkard.

Valentina, anxious about it, had once investigated about why the prince suffered from heart disease. This was because she thought that if it was due to some conspiracy, the person who plotted it would become her enemy.

But, even after investigating for nearly one year, she did not find at all some kind of plot. In the end, Valentina drew the conclusion that it was simply an illness and closed her investigation.

The black-haired Vanadis shook off her past memory, and thought again about the present situation.

---Assuming that this country divided in two, the problem will be the Vanadis other than me...

In Zchted, there were some people with power capable of settling confusion which arose. People who have an authority exceeding that of a noble and who also held a mighty military power.

---With Alexandra dead, other than me, there are five Vanadis. Even if I can't do something about all of them, I must make a situation in which at least half of them would not move.

Among them, it was probably easy to seal off the movement of Ellen who governed LeitMeritz, Mira who governed Olmutz and Sophie who governed Polesia. The dukedoms which these three governed were sharing their borders with foreign countries.

---If confusion arises in Brune, Eleanora can't help but watch out there. If Muozinel was to make a disquieting movement again now, Ludmira and Sophia should not be able to move out from their territories.

She left Elizavetta aside for the time being. In the case of Ilda and Eugene opposing each other, Elizavetta would probably take Ilda's side. Understanding that was enough.

Olga was a too much unknown factor, so she could not yet make a judgment. This was because what she only knew about Olga was that she had been spending a wandering life for nearly two years.

From the information Valentina collected in this capital, Olga cooperated with Tigrevurmud Vorn and participated in Asvarre's civil war, but she was not able to get the details. She needed more information.

And, the Vanadis chosen by the Luminous Flame Bargren after Alexandra did not show up yet. Or maybe Bargren had not yet chosen someone.

A ^{Viralt}Dragon Tool which lost its Vanadis does not immediately choose the next Vanadis. In the Zighted Kingdom history of about 300 years, periods with a Vanadis absence were not that rare.

Valentina would move at the time when half of the Vanadis would not be able to move.

---Ending up somewhere else and not returning to Osterode won't do any good.

While quietly touching a flower, Valentina thought about her territory Osterode.

Osterode was in the northeast of Zighted.

It was five years ago that she became Vanadis. It was when she was 17 years old.

Osterode in those days was known to be the weakest dukedom among the seven dukedoms governed by Vanadis.

To the north, a sea of intense cold in which drift ice floated, steep mountains which rose as if piercing the heaven and a great coniferous forest to the east. It was quite difficult to call it an opened land.

The neighboring countries with which it could make trade with were not close, and it did not have a fertile earth. Even the port, compared with Legnica and Lebus, could only be used for a short period. There was that and also the fact that the countries in the Far East including Jaffa hardly came from the sea to here.

In addition, the previous Vanadis was someone who did not concern herself about Osterode.

“Osterode isn’t mine, but the Vanadis’. When I stop being Vanadis, Osterode won’t be mine anymore.”

Saying so, she seemed to hardly show interest in governmental affairs. When it came to war, she displayed a strength like a fierce god and thus built distinguished military services, but she did not try to assertively make Osterode rich.

This was how Osterode was, but Valentina considered it to be an irreplaceable treasure.

The Estes House in which she was born and raised in was of small nobility without any redeeming feature aside from the oldness of its lineage. Judging from the family name Estes, it was a branch family of the royal family, but it had no territory inherited from generation after generation, and only one small mansion in the capital.

Money enough to not be worried about eating was provided by the royal palace to the family, but that was only it.

To obtain power as a woman, she could only make herself be liked by the royalty and tilted nobility who held power. The Estes House had no power.

Even so, Valentina did not give up; she raised her cultural level and also strove for the training of military arts. There were many books and rolls in their mansion and she liked to touch them, but she did not intend to finish her life being buried in those.

In such a place, the territories and soldiers had come to live with it. Even though it was said to be the weakest dukedom.

“—Ezendeis”

She tightly grasped the deep crimson and jet black scythe which appeared before her and called.

“If you will lend me your power to my wish, be by my side. But if you consider my wish to be outrageous, then choose another person.”

The Hollow Shadow did not disappear from Valentina’s hand. During the five years after Valentina became Vanadis, she exerted herself to make Osterode rich. It was probably fortunate that she discovered halite ores and could exploit them, but other than that, she racked her brain in political affairs such as reducing the taxes while expanding farmlands.

Even the fact of pretending to have a weak constitution was one of them.

King Victor had often given the order to go to war to the Vanadis. In the battle of Dinant last year, he gave an order to Osterode to depart for the front, and also regarding this incident, he requested LeitMeritz and Lebus to move their soldiers.

This was because it was natural for the royal family to reduce the assets and military power of Vanadis and nobles who were retainers.

Valentina simply (plainly) resisted to this.

She delayed her departure to the front by saying that she fell sick, and even if she arrived at the battlefield, she would say that she was injured and immediately retreated. She would treat even someone with just some scratches as an injured person and asserted that he received damage. It was only about the bandits who ran rampant in her territory that she adopted a quick and stern response.

As a result, Osterode became so rich that it was incomparable to five years ago. Even in comparison with the other Vanadis' dukedoms, she did not think that she was inferior.

However, it was still early to be glad. Let alone reaching out for the throne, Valentina understood well her current self who did not hook even a finger. Even how she was seen from others' eyes, she intended to walk down the path she desired step by step.

“—It isn’t like you made petals beautifully bloom from the beginning, is it?”

With a smile, Valentina lightly poked the white petals of a ^{podснежник}snowdrop with a fingertip. The ^{podснежник}snowdrops which had made the petals bloom as if dangling flickeringly shook.

---What is left are those guests of Brune...

Valentina’s purplish-black pupils became faintly cloudy. For about half a year, she had secretly given shelter to nobles of the Brune Kingdom.

They were Duke Maximilian Bennusa Ganelon and Marquis Charon Anquetil Greast.

Ganelon was one of the nobles who represented the Brune Kingdom, but he was defeated by Duke Thenardier in last year’s civil war, his mansion set on fire. His body was not found in the ruins of fire. He made it look as if he attempted suicide after going crazy (losing it ?) to the shock of the defeat.

Marquis Greast was a being who could be said to be Ganelon’s trusted retainer (confidant), but he also disappeared after being defeated by Duke Thenardier

and was considered killed in action. This man was of course also alive.

Like that, about when the civil war ended in the victory of Tigrevurmud Vorn who had Princess Regin, the two men secretly met with Valentina and fled to Osterode. Neither Princess Regin nor King Victor should know about this.

And, several days ago, both of them left Osterode and went to Brune.

In order to cause a new confusion in Brune.

Or, they might intend to hold hegemony in Brune this time for sure, but it did not matter to Valentina. It would be good for her if Brune fell into confusion. As long as that confusion would not reach Osterode in the northeast of Zighted.

They would probably fight hard for her ambitions, too. That should lead to Valentina's victory.

In the afternoon seven days after the fight with Ilda, Ellen returned to her Imperial Palace with thirty cavalrymen.

Limlisha who was Ellen's adjutant gathered the soldiers who participated in this battle in the courtyard and welcomed Ellen.

She was now 20 years old. She was called Lim by those close to her including Ellen. She was a tall beautiful woman who tied her dull golden hair on the left side of her head and there was no fragment of sociability on her face.

However, it was not as if she completely lacked in emotions. For Ellen who was her lord and also her close friend, she made such an expression as she tried to be always calm.

That day also, she bowed to Ellen with an unamiable face.

"I already heard the report of victory from Rurick. Congratulations, Eleanora-sama. Weren't you injured?"

“As you see, Lim. Besides, Eugene-dono is safe, too.”

Hearing Ellen’s words, Lim’s blue eyes floated a color of relief. The Earl with an impressive long gray beard was also Lim’s teacher.

As Ellen headed to the courtyard, she gave words of appreciation to the soldiers gathered.

“You have done well, all of you. Although there were casualties, we succeed in capturing Duke Bydgauche, and we were also able to protect Earl Pardu who is a friend of LeitMeritz. I want you to be proud of having won and also having protected our friend.”

After that, Ellen promised a reward, and made the soldiers disperse. Since this battle was something requested from the royal palace, the reward money would come from there. Although it was the Lebus army’s credit, she intended to ask for very much as they were able to catch Ilda alive.

The silver-haired Vanadis did not break her composed attitude even a little until then and also turned a bright smile to the soldiers.

But, when she parted from the soldiers and was alone with Lim, she erased her smile and put on a serious expression. To her lord who headed to her work office at a quick pace, Lim suspiciously narrowed her eyes.

“Eleanora-sama, did something happen?”

“Yes. A very important thing.”

To Lim who chased her at a quick pace, Ellen promptly answered. Immediately realizing that she could not talk about it in the corridor, Lim followed the Vanadis and walked in on the work office. Ellen who violently sat on the chair of the office looked up her adjutant who was also a close friend after breathing out a sigh.

“If possible, I would like to change my clothes, take a hot bath and talked while also carrying a toast with wine, but my heart wouldn’t hold till then. Listen! —Tigre is alive.”

Lim who heard Ellen’s words stood stock still on the spot in utter amazement. As she came to her senses several seconds after, she made an unusually sullen expression and stated a complaint.

“Eleanora-sama. You probably intend to surprise me like this again, but there are things which you should not say even as a joke—”

“It’s not a joke.”

Standing from the chair, Ellen answered as she leaned forward on her desk. To that vigor, Lim unintentionally swallowed her words, shut her mouth, and fixedly stared at her lord who was three years younger than her.

“What do you mean...?”

The voice of Lim who asked the question was faintly trembling.

Tigrevurmud Vorn was also an important person for her. But, that Tigre died, she thought so. The fact that she burst into tears in front of Eugene who was her teacher was still fresh in her mind. Although there were the words of Ellen whom she trusted more than anyone, it was no wonder that she could not suddenly believe them either.

Ellen explained in detail about the youth named Urz who was beside Elizavetta Fomina. She also added that

he shot arrows in the darkness of night and splendidly killed Ilda's horse.

“Rurick was surprised, too, but he really looked just like him. The voice was Tigre's, too. Besides, the name Urz also attracted my attention.”

“...It is the name of Lord Tigrevurmud's late father, isn't it?”

To Lim who squinted thoughtfully, Ellen strongly nodded. However, Lim immediately shook her face with a difficult face.

“However, do you really find it possible that Lord Tigrevurmud fell into the sea and was washed ashore in a coast somewhere in Lebus?”

From the place where Tigre fell into the sea, it would take two or three days to reach the nearest coast even by ship. Even if he was carried well by the tide, he would be made to choose between freezing to death and dying by drowning before drifting ashore.

“If we think normally about it, you're right. But perhaps something happened.”

Tightly grasping her fist, Ellen eagerly appealed to Lim.

“In the first place, the circumstances when that guy fell into the sea are too particular. The demon riding on the sea dragon attacked him and destroyed the ship. If it wasn’t Sophie who said it, I would have taken it as a ridiculous nonsense story and beaten the one saying it.”

Wouldn’t doing it a little be too much? Though Lim thought so and since she felt like she would have also done the same thing, she kept silent.

“Besides, Tigre has that mysterious bow.”

In the Earl Vorn House where Tigre was born and raised, there was a bow as an heirloom. It only looked like a featureless jet black bow, but it had strange points such as reacting to the Dragonic Tools. In Brune’s civil war last year, they had been saved several times by its power.

“Was the one called Urz holding a black bow?”

“No. from what I saw rapidly, it was an extremely common bow.”

Ellen shook her head. However, the indomitable shine which colored her red eyes did not fade at all.

“But, no matter what I don’t think that that guy is a different person. I can’t discard that possibility, but...”

The possibility of it being another person. What she also said to Rurick had barely covered up for the stirring of Ellen’s feelings. If not for that, the silver-haired Vanadis would have probably exploded in joy without any hesitation and let her tears overflow.

“Then, what do we do?”

There was the fact that the person whom Urz was serving was Elizavetta, which was troublesome. Even If Ellen requested to talk with her, she would probably give a reason and refuse.

Ellen showed signs of hesitation, but as she shook her head right and left so as to cut off her hesitation, she looked up at her older subordinate, with a sincere expression.

“Won’t you go to Lebus and look for yourself?”

Lim opened her eyes wide, gasped and stared at Ellen. The golden hair which was tied on the left side of her head slightly shook due to too much surprise.

“Me...?”

“In this Imperial Palace, the number of people close to Tigre enough to be able to tell whether or not it is him is limited. Since Rurick’s face is already known, I can’t send him.”

She did not think that Urz and Elizavetta would immediately forget about the man who made such a fervent speech. In addition, when she recalled the situation at that time, Rurick might become emotional and misled his judgment.

“However, I can’t alone...”

“Even if you say so, is there any other reliable person? When it comes to someone who understands Tigre more than you and I, only Teita—”

When she said up to there, the door of the office was knocked from the outside. A maid’s voice could be heard

.

“Massas Rodant-sama of the Brune Kingdom has come . He wishes to have an audience with Vanadis-sama...”

Ellen and Lim looked at each other. Both their expressions were tinged with a shadow of seriousness. As Ellen took a deep breath and calmed her voice, she called out the other side of the door.

“Please lead him to a reception room where the fireplace is fired. I will head immediately, too.”



Massas Rodant was 56 years old this year. Wrapping his small, stocky body with black woolen clothes, he was holding a hat with a feather ornament under his arm. His gray beard was carefully arranged and even if he faced Ellen and Lim, he observed courtesy and bowed in salutation.

Being let through the drawing room, even though there was only the trio now in the room, his attitude did not change.

“With due respect to Vanadis-dono, it is good that you are healthy above all. Limlisha-dono, too.”

“You don’t seem to have changed, either. I feel regretful for having made you come all the way here from Brune in this season.”

Ellen bowed deeply. And then, she recommended a chair to Massas.

A chandelier made of bronze was suspended on the ceiling, and dozens of candles were lined up on it (chandelier) and brightly illuminated the room. A

brickwork fireplace was provided on the wall and fire brightly burned there and warmed the room.

A small table was put in the center of the room and three armchairs were placed around it. Waiting for Massas to sit, Ellen and Lim also sat down.

“There might be a lot of circumstances, but could you tell me? About Tigre... Sorry, Earl Vorn.”

As he was holding a hat, Massas asked without beating about the bush. His expression looked calm, but neither Ellen nor Lim overlooked that an unfathomable anger blurred on his eyes.

Tigre was the son of Massas’ best friend, and since his best friend died, he had looked after Tigre as his own son. Tigre liked Massas too. There was no way that he would keep quiet with the situation which became like this.

“It's not only me. There are a lot of people in Brune that are concerned about it including Her Highness Princess Regin. Also for them, you must tell me about the story in detail.”

Ellen made a small nod and began to talk from when the King requested him to go to Asvarre. While hearing the story, Massas made a wry face and sighed.

“It might be misplaced to say it to Vanadis-dono, but since when had Earl Vorn become a retainer of the Zchted Kingdom?”

“He is a guest General of our country. That position hasn’t changed even now. So, His Majesty the King also claimed it.”

Leaving aside what Ellen thought, she first had to state the official stance as a Vanadis of Zchted. Even if the other party was Massas who was a close friend.

“Earl Vorn is still now under search, but if he is not found at this rate, he will be judged as dead and compensation (indemnities) will be paid.”

After saying so, Ellen deeply bowed her head once again. Lim followed her lord and also bowed.

“I’m sorry. If I had declined His Majesty the King’s request...”

“Please raise your head. Vanadis-dono. Limlisha-dono.”

Without changing his calm tone, Massas calmly called them. However, the hat with the feather ornament that was in his hand was distorted by an anger which he could not restrain.

“It looks like I will have to meet His Majesty the King. Can I ask you for a guide to the capital and a commission to His Majesty?”

“I will of course arrange that, but...”

Ellen cut her words there for a moment and stared at Massas with a serious expression. She hesitated about whether or not she should talk about the thought which came in her mind when she heard about his visit.

“—Lord Massas. There is something I want to ask fully aware that it’s impudent, but...”

Massas’ eyes moved and stared at Ellen. He took the hand which was holding the hat to his mouth and patted his gray beard.

“Let me hear it.”

Ellen who took a breath of relief inwardly, first explained about the youth named Urz.

“To me, that man was none other than Tigre.”

Ellen did not say Earl Vorn, but his nickname “Tigre”, but she did not correct it. As Massas heaved a grand sigh, he stretched himself and leaned on the back of the chair.

“I think that Vanadis-dono is a kind of person who wouldn't say such a lie, but...”

It meant that he was skeptical.

In case that it was a completely irrelevant name, even if Ellen eagerly explained how much they looked alike, Massas would have laughed it off. But, the name ‘Urz’ held a special meaning also for Massas. This was because it was the name of the man who was his best friend and Tigre’s father.

Without breaking her sincere attitude, Ellen continued. His profile was illuminated by the fire of the fireplace and was dyed vermillion.

“I intended to have Lim go. This is because when it comes to people in this Imperial Place that know Tigre well, other than me, there is only Lim and Rurick, but if you are to go with Lim too, nothing would be more reassuring than this.”

Massas did not immediately answer and slightly groaned. He turned his face away from Ellen and stared at the fireplace. He seemed to be thinking about something, but he returned his gaze to the silver-haired Vanadis as it seemed to be settled.

“I would also like to take Teita, but is it all right?”

These words surprised Ellen and Lim. The two women looked at Massas with a face which could hide their puzzlement.

“If you have a reason, would you tell me...?”

“Whether or not that youth is Tigre, Teita will very accurately ascertain it more than me.”

With a tone as if it was a matter of course, Massas answered. He also said “Tigre” like Ellen.

Ellen and Lim looked at each other.

Teita was Tigre's maid. She would be 16 years old this year. She, who was by Tigre's side since he was small, formally became his maid at the age of 11 years old. She followed him until the end in the civil war of Brune last year. And even when it was decided that the youth would come to Zighted as a Guest General.

The way how Teita was depressed when she heard that Tigre fell into the sea and went missing was something painful to see. She had not neglected her work as a maid, but her energetic smile became somewhat hollow and her brightness and positiveness were lost.

Even since she came to LeitMeritz, she went to a shrine outside the Imperial Palace every day. However, according to the story of a shrine maiden, it seemed that she had often shed tears in the middle of prayer for these past two months. It was obvious about who she thought of when she prayed.

While there was still childishness remaining on her lovely features, she also possessed fortitude. But as expected, Teita was a girl appropriate for her age.

The fact that Ellen had talked about only Lim and did not call Teita was because she feared that it might make her rejoice prematurely.

As he was not immediately answered, Massas said.

“Could you explain the circumstances to Teita and let her decide? I won’t say something like if that child doesn’t go, I won’t go too. But, to be absolutely sure, we need her.”

While hesitating, Ellen nodded to Lim. Lim bowed to Massas and left the drawing room. The old Earl said with a calm tone while stroking his gray beard.

“In case that that youth is not Tigre, I will head to the capital Silesia. The problem is in the case that that youth is found to be Tigre. What will we do at that time?”

“We will take him even if it’s by force, is what I would like to say, but it will become a war against Lebus if we do so. It’s troublesome, but we can only influence Elizavetta through His Majesty the King.”

“Hmm”, Massas nodded. Whether or not that youth named Urz was Tigre, it seemed that it would not change

the fact that he would go to the capital of the Zighted Kingdom.

After that, Teita showed up led by Lim before long. Her chestnut tied in twintail, she wore a white apron on a cloth with black long sleeves and a skirt which reached to her ankles

When she saw Massas, she suddenly brightened her face. It was a not forced, but a pure smile that both Ellen and Lim had not seen for a long time.

“Massas-sama, it has been a long time!”

“Yea. It’s good to see that you are also healthy above all, Teita.”

Massas naturally revealed a broad smile all over his face. If Tigre was like a son for him, Teita was like a daughter.

Lim decided to keep standing and recommended Teita to sit. The chestnut-haired maid, though making a bewildered face, thanked Lim and sat down on the chair.

Ellen turned a serious look towards her.

“Teita. What I will tell you from now on isn’t some nonsense thing. It’s something that I saw and heard.”

Prefacing so, the silver-haired Vanadis talked about Urz. A color of surprise spread in Teita’s hazel-colored pupils. She leaned forward and asked breathlessly.

“R-Really!? Is Tigre-sama really...”

“I will also be at ease if every single person was pure (innocent) like you.”

Ellen revealed a wry smile to Teita’s frank attitude and stroked her head. When she removed her hand, Ellen erased her smile and continued her words with a stern expression.

“Listen well. I can’t say for sure that it’s him. It might also be my misunderstanding. But, I think that that man is Tigre. I want you to make sure instead of me who can’t move. It will by no means be a comfortable trip, but will you go?”



“I will go! Please let me go!”

Tightly grasping her small hands, Teita stood up from the chair and shouted. She did not show even a hint of hesitation. The three people (Massas, Lim and Ellen) looked at each other and nodded.

Ellen once again bowed her head to Teita and Massas.

“I’m counting on you.”

The night of that day, Teita and Lim were making preparations for the journey. Teita never had a long journey since the civil war last year, and Lim prepared outfits for cold weather for her.

Zchted’s winter was more severe than Brune’s. The sunlight was weak and the wind was cold. If one was to go out without wearing heavy winter clothes, his body would begin to shake just by walking a little.

“Even so, it could be said that the area in the south of Zched such as this LeitMeritz is still warm.”

Lim explained so to Teita. When crossing the large river Valta which was in the north of the capital Silesia and further going to the north, the coldness would become severe at a stretch.

The children there were trained by their parents “so as not to sweat as much as possible”. This was because sweat got cold and would take away the body temperature. And it would result in death in some cases.

Lebus was further northward than the large river Valta. Due to the wind blowing from the sea in the west, it seemed that that part of the north was better, but you can never be too careful.

Since they headed towards such an environment, Lim did not compromise.

She prepared a hat which covered not only the head, but also from the ears to the area of cheeks. A mantle backed with fur, the hem reached until under the knees, and she chose one which treated fur on the collar and also the cuffs. She diligently checked whether the gloves

and leather boots had a hole or if they were not worn out

.

By the way, the preparations for the journey were not done in Lim's room, but in Teita's room.

This was because Lim wanted to keep her room from being seen. She kept it secret to others, but there were a lot of teddy bears in her room. However, those who knew this secret were few starting with Ellen.

Teita's room was not so wide, but it was thoroughly cleaned and well tidied up. The cover of the back of the chair and the pillows which were put on the bed seemed to have been handmade by her and warm embroidery was given (to them).

Most of them were things belonging to the Imperial Palace, but only the gloves belonged to Teita. They were made of rabbit skin, and that skin was also firmly put in the inside of the gloves. There were several places with mended marks, but it looks like there would be no problem even if Lim checked them.

“Those were given to me by Tigre-sama.”

As she tightly hugged the gloves said to be white and which had gotten slightly dirty, Teita smiled. The fact that they were dirty was the proof of how much she used those gloves. Tigre told her that rather than diligently using them so that they did not get dirty, she should use them without reservation since he would not mind even if they were dirty.

“Tigre-sama makes gloves with rabbit skin for me every year.”

“Every year, huh.”

Lim thought that she was a little envious.

“It’s because I grow bigger each year and the gloves become narrow, a hole would stand out in approximately a year. Limlisha-san, too, if you ask Tigre-sama, I’m sure that he will also make a pair for you.”

To Teita who said so with a smile, Lim nodded back while saying “that’s right”.

The atmosphere got heavy; this chestnut-haired girl believed that Tigre was alive. Lim was not able to believe Ellen’s story like her.

Before long, Teita who finished changing her clothes stood before a mirror. She put on a hat, wrapped a muffler on her neck, wore a mantle, put on trousers and wore boots after winding thick clothes around her feet. She wore gloves on her hands. Most of her clothing was brown, but only the gloves were white.

“It’s kind of warm.”

“It’s just the right temperature at least within the room.”

While also changing herself, Lim answered. Her clothes were made of bear fur and most of her clothing was of blackish color. After checking the conditions of her clothes, Lim looked at Teita. She had her usual unamiable face, but a color of anxiety was floating in her blue pupils.

“Teita. Will you really come?”


Lim was used to long journeys, Massas too. But, it was not so for this brave maid.

Although Ellen said it like that, she did not know whether or not that Urz person was really Tigre. The case

that it was a different person might be waiting for them, after having kept riding on the highway while shivering from coldness and arriving.

Teita looked up at Lim with a blank face for a moment and immediately bowed her head with a gentle smile.

“Thank you, Limlisha-san.”



「ありがとうございます。
リムアリーシャさん。
だいじょうぶです」

「ティッタ。本当に来るのですか？」

Teita who raised her face shook her head.

“I will be all right. I will be scared if I’m alone, but both Massas-sama and Limlisha-san are there, so.”

In her hazel-colored eyes, there was not a light of dependence, but that of trust. Lim quietly spread a smile on her lips, too. She decided to change her way of thinking.

“I see. I will do my best for Lord Massas and you.”

The morning of the next day, there was beautiful weather so as to make one stare wide-eyed.

The wind was cold, but the sky was blue and though the sun was weak, it shone white and threw up light on the earth.

“It’s a nice day for a departure.”

While confirming the condition of the horses near the back gate of the Imperial Palace, Massas said as he seemed to be in good mood. They were to depart from this back gate.

There were three horses, but one of them was the baggage carrier which served as substitute horse. Since Teita was not so good at riding a horse, she was to ride alternating between Lim's and Massa's horses.

That Teita had Lim perform a last check on the heavy winter clothes she wore.

“Do we have to wear everything from here?”

“Yeah. Please, get used to them from now. We will not take them off any longer after all.”

Lim who finished the check once again confirmed the plan with Massas.

“We will go to Lebus as itinerant entertainers. Lord Massas will be the father, I will be his daughter and Teita will be the maid. My mother was a person from Zched, but she had already died. That's it, isn't that?”

In that case, the explanation about that Massas and Teita were people from Brune, and Lim was a person from Zched would be plausible. By the way, they passed themselves as itinerant entertainers because if they were to do simple juggling or fortune-telling, Massas would be able to do it.

“Let’s go with the thought that my dead wife must have been quite a beautiful woman. Then, that we are going to Lebus in order to meet the bereaved family of my dead wife, right?”

“Yes. Just in case, I prepare also a pass which LeitMeritz officially issued.”

It was something that Ellen who was the lord of LeitMeritz made. It was not a fake.

“When we come out of LeitMeritz, we will head straight north, first to Legnica. Legnica doesn’t have a Vanadis currently, but they said that they will cooperate with Eleanora-sama. I do not intend to place excessive trust in them, but at least, they can guarantee the safety of our journey.”

When Sasha who was Vanadis of Legnica before died, Ellen was present at her last moments in the port town of Lippner. Ellen was not in a situation where she could thoughtlessly move around and she herself understood that, but she desperately rode on horse for Sasha.

Later on, a letter from Legnica arrived under Ellen. There, the thanks to having been present at Sasha’s last

moments were lengthily spelt. And, one sentence about the fact that they would certainly help her in case she needed something was attached.

It was an informal (private) letter. It was not something as untrustworthy as the fellow nobles “becoming the strength” of the fellow Vanadis’. Even so, both Ellen and Lim were thankful for that letter. They decided to believe the feelings which they put in their letter.

There were more aphorisms which admonished the fact of moving by feelings than in ancient times. But, that was contrary to the fact that humans are emotional creatures.

“Then, let’s assume that we can safely transit until Legnica. What will we do after that?”

“We will go to Lebus. We will observe the situation in a town at the land near the Imperial Palace. According to Ellen’s story, Lord Tigrevurmud acted as an attendant of Elizavetta-sama or something like that. We will examine the detailed standpoint of whether or not we can make a chance to meet him.”

“There is no telling whether it will be Tigre, you know?”

Being pointed out by Massas, Lim unintentionally blushed. While revealing an evil smile to her reaction, Massas shook his gray beard.

“However, what would we do if we can’t meet Tigre?”

“But Lord Massas, didn’t you say just now that there is no telling whether it will be Lord Tigrevurmud?”

When Lim said so, the old Earl groaned small and shook his stocky body. Lim slightly loosened her unamiable expression, but she immediately put on a serious expression.

“In the case that we can’t meet him... I didn’t consider it yet now. I will think about something before we arrive at that town.”

“Hmm. When the time comes, I will somehow manage it.”

“Do you have some kind of plan?”

Lim opened her eyes wide and looked at Massas. Massas answered casually.

“I think that it would be a good idea to say the errant knight Massas would like to have an audience with Vanadis-sama.”

“...The errant knight, huh.”

Lim made a face saying “I don’t know what to say”. An errant knight was basically a knight who piled up training while traveling around various places with his lord’s permission. But, it also implied that a knight wandering doesn’t have a lord or is unable to have a one.

From the viewpoint that it was often the case that it would be a penniless mercenary with the title of knight, unless being a very renowned person, the people’s impression would be bad.

However, not paying heed to the reaction of Lim who could not hide her uneasiness, Massas laughed happily.

“Whether that Urz is Tigre himself or is another person, they should have searched for information about him from Brune. There, if a discernibly experienced Brune aristocrat like me appears, I think about whether I

may say that, I would by all means like to hear their story
.”

Lim could not reply immediately and groaned with a too serious expression. She thought that he had a point, but she also thought that it was a ridiculous idea.

“Let’s think about it again when we arrive at that town
.”

In the end, she put it on hold (postponed it).

The three people left from the back gate. There was not even one soldier on lookout there. Ellen ordered to clear out the people at only this time. Of course, other places were strictly guarded.

Having come to see off Lim and the others were Ellen, Rurick and one animal.

“Lunie!”

Teita smiled and raised a joyful voice. Flapping its small wings and jumping at her was a dragon of the size of a fat cat. It was a young dragon.

It had a lizard-like constitution and on its back, there were a pair of wings which closely resembled that of a bat. The color of scales covering its small body was verdigris like copper. Though a young dragon, it grew horns on its head and the fangs in its mouth were thickly sharp. Its look was also steep.

However, Teita, showing no signs of fear, extended her hands to the young dragon called Lunie. The young dragon also jumped into Teita's arms as if unwilling to part with her. It had never taken such an attitude towards even Ellen who was its owner, but it had really become attached to Teita.

“If Sophie was to see that, I'm sure she would feel jealous.”

Looking at the pleasant scene between the young girl and the young dragon, Ellen leaked a wry smile. Sophie liked dragons, and when she came to LeitMeritz, it could even be said that she almost always messed around with Lunie. And Lunie avoided such a Sophie.

As Ellen erased her smile and put on a serious expression, she turned her gaze towards Lim. She nodded with the intention of saying “I’m counting on you”. Lim also nodded back. This much was enough for the two girls to understand each other.

Rurick with a face drifting a grim feeling bowed his head to Massas.

“Please. Please, I hope you will bring back Lord Tigrevurmud.”

“I understand. I understand, so a mature man shouldn’t bow his head like this.”

Massas tapped Rurick’s shoulders and cheered him up. While smiling at the bald head knight who raised his face, the old Earl was inwardly in a gloomy mood.

Let’s assume that that youth named Urz was Tigre.

And, let’s say we would safely bring him back.

Would it really be all’s well that ends well?

---After all, reality isn’t a fairy tale...

Princess Regin who was in Brune's royal palace would definitely demand his return on the same day. Zchtet also, after having made a blunder like this, would not be able to disagree. At that time, what kind of reaction would Ellen, Lim and Rurick who were here show?

In the negotiations of that case, Massas would definitely be made to stand.

---Should I have brought Gerard along?

Gerard, son of Viscount Augres who was a friend was the secretary of the Brune Kingdom.

Until several months ago, Gerard's work was to make a round trip between the Imperial Palace of LeitMeritz and Brune's capital Nice.

When he visited LeitMeritz, he reported the state of progress of the construction of the Vosyes Mountains path to Ellen and heard various stories about Zchtet from Tigre and her.

After finishing it, he returned to Brune; he went to the capital Nice, and had an audience with Princess Regin in

the royal palace. He talked about the various information that he got in Zchted, and about Tigre's present condition.

Regarding this matter, it was based on the difference of experience and achievements that the order to go to Zchted was issued not to Gerard, but Massas. Gerard was competent, but only one year had passed since he became secretary. His achievements for each negotiation were also so far insufficient.

So, Massas who accumulated experiences suitable for his age and who was also close to Tigre was appointed. At present, Gerard was entrusted with another assignment and should be in the southern part of Brune.

---That's right. If Tigre is safe and if Gerard's work is settled at the time I understood so, I will ask him to help me. Saying that it will be a good experience for him.

If it was to decide Gerard's fate at his own convenience, it would ease Massas' mood to some extent.

"Well then, Eleanora-sama, we are off."

Straddling on the horse, Lim saluted her. Massas who got on horseback after placing Teita also silently bowed,

and Teita also quickly bowed her head while being careful so as not to fall.

Ellen and Rurick silently nodded back. Lunie flapped its wings only once as if encouraging them.

Lim and Massas rode their horses, and Teita clung to the back of a horse.

A gust of wind blew through the three people's backs.

Having noticed that was Ellen and Lunie. Lunie, not seeming to be concerned about it, flew away somewhere, and Ellen turned her gaze to the Silver Flash hung to her waist. She gently patted the wing shaped sword guard.

“So, you also cheer for Lim and the others. Arifal.”

Ellen thought that the three people's journey would surely go well.

In the south of the Brune Kingdom, there was a port town called Plage. It was a lively town where trade ships of Sachstein, Muozinel, the far Asvarre and various kingdoms in the south went in and out.

From the Brune ships which drew a Red Horse with a black mane on the ship's hold, the Sachstein ships of solid structure and the thin Muozinel ships, the ships of the southern countries with strangely high but adequate prows, and flat ships called hemisphere lined up on the wharf.

The people walking down the streets of the town were also various. If there were Brune merchants suntanned red, there were also Sachstein mercenaries who were walking with a steep look.

If the dancer whose brown skin was characteristic to the Muozinel persons attracted men with their intense dance, Minstrels from Asvarre were charming young women with the sound of their harps and their sweet singing voices.

Fruits which were said to only be harvested in countries in the far south were lined up on the stalls, and next to them, big birds with showy color were tied with a

rope. Even dishes never seen before attracted people's attention and while the sun had risen, the hustle and bustle did not die out no matter which street one walked.

In one area of the town, there was a luxurious bar. It was a kind of shop which freely let anyone get in, but a shop which selected customers from the level (phase) of entering (so the store selectively picks its customers from the way they enter the store? It's not really clear, needs clarifying). Therefore, the interior design was well furnished and the quality of service was also high.

It was a two-storied building; the first floor was the scenery of a very typical bar. On the second floor, there were many big and small rooms. The stone walls were thick, and unless one talked in a very loud voice, his voice would not leak outside.

Now, seven men had gathered in one of the rooms. Since it was a room for a great number of people, it was not cramped at all even with seven people.

On the oak table which was made by a craftsman renowned in Sachstein, various dishes were lined up, but most of them were hardly touched. The number of silver cups, for the number of persons, and which were filled

with wine were also put, but as expected, they did not also decrease.

“—How is the situation of the capital?”

One of them asked in quiet voice.

“It’s the very example of peace. That princess has no remarkable achievements, but she has no fault, either. She is a youth of 16 years old, and judging from the fact that she starts with political affairs about one year ago, you may say that she is doing well.”

He answered in a tone which the other men could not help but accept; and another man nodded.

“She escaped when she was about to be killed by a heinous aristocrat, repelled the Muozinel army which has invaded and recovered her legitimate throne after all. In addition, she has a beautiful face, too. I can understand that her reputation is good.”

Another man shook his head as if denying it.

“With just a good reputation, political affairs don’t continue. There is Bodwin and Earl Rodant who support that princess. Especially the existence of the Earl was a blind spot.”

“Is he that much a personage? I thought that he wouldn’t have minded the late Duke Thenardier very much.”

“That old man is unexpectedly widely known. If it’s only that, then it’s not a big deal, but now there are strong supports like the princess and the prime minister. He has steadily won over the aristocrats such as barons and viscounts one by one in a honest way. There was no relationship between those who were following Duke Thenardier and those who were supporting Duke Ganelon.”

“If it is about Barons and Viscounts, then it won’t be such a big deal. Aren’t you worrying about it too much?”

One of them said as he ridiculed, but the man next to him calmly rebuked him.

“You can’t measure only through peerage. Rodant and Tigrevurmud Vorn are both earls. Earl Rodant probably

intended to call out to the Dukes and Marquis of the country after he had lined up the number of his allies.”

“Among the nobles who have promised to cooperate with him, aren’t there people who can oppose or tried to oppose Rodant?”

One struck the table in irritation and looked around at the people present.

“If it’s only about those ones, then there are some as it stands. But, when it comes to the people who providing for both sides... Those who still have remaining power/ reserves are afraid of the moment when they will be blamed for the fact that they have sided with the princess , and they have cowered away in fear. While those with high-spirits do not have the power to move their surroundings with only mere words.”

One said with a sarcastic voice mixed with a sigh.

“Is it due to the fact Duke Thenardier and Duke Ganelon were too great?”

Both Thenardier and Ganelon controlled many aristocrats through overwhelming majesty and fear and had subdued them.

When they both disappeared, there was no one amongst the gathered nobles that could take their places.

Steid, the confidant of Duke Thenardier, who was recognized to be a suitable substitute, had died in the civil war, and there were also rumors that Marquis Greast, who was said to be Duke Ganelon's right hand man, had also died.

Except those who followed Regin, the aristocrats and influential persons of Brune, you might say that they were moving about in confusion without ground.

"Let's think positively. Such people were easy to control/manage. By the way, how about the knights squadrons? Although, not everyone necessarily holds loyalty towards the princess who pretended to be a prince I would think."

"Certainly, there are people who are opposing her, but the Navarre Knight Squadron to the princess, has openly declared that they swear allegiance to the princess. There are not many people who will directly fight against them. When that time comes, there are actually two knight squadrons who will cooperate with us though."

“When you say Navarre, you’re talking about the knight squadron of that black knight Roland? But, Roland died.”

While saying so, there was some fear in the man’s voice. The name of Roland, even if he left this world, still seemed to make certain people shake in fear.

“A man called Olivier, the vice-commander has gathered the Navarre Knight Squadron currently as substitute commander. This man is quite a skilled person . In addition, there are also other Knight Squadron such as Perche and Calvados who side with the Princess.”

“Wouldn’t it preferable that even a small number of people take action? The reign of the princess will become solid as time passes. And Zchtet will also build a town in Agnes sooner or later.”

One half rose his buttocks from the chair and emphasized. Some among the people attending did a small groan after hearing the word Agnes.

The people who groaned now were all influential persons of the port town in the southern part of Brune.

There were wealthy merchants who amassed riches in the trade with Muozinel, Sachstein and the countries in the south across the sea.

They were supporting Duke Thenardier, and bore a grudge against Regin who defeated the Duke.

It was not as if Duke Thenardier was especially tolerant towards them. However, he understood the moral and material profits that the trades brought, and dealt with the trade ships of Muozinel and Sachstein with a firm attitude.

In addition, Thenardier also overlooked some evil deeds and injustice by receiving bribes. Regarding this, there was probably also the purpose to grasp the merchants' weakness. Even if Thenardier himself was blamed (threatened), he had the authority and military power to eliminate it.

In addition, last year Muozinel has invaded respectively from the land and sea, but it was Duke Thenardier who repelled the fleet of the Muozinel army who attacked from the sea.

For the merchants, Thenardier, even if fearful, was a reliable protector.

On the other hand, how about Princess Regin who was governing Brune now?

The chief administrator who had been dispatched by the capital was, unlike Thenardier, a person on whom such a conventional way did not pass. Moreover, in having cooperated with Thenardier, a severe attention (look) was turned towards the merchants.

The fact that Brune also ceded the ground of Agnes to the Zighted Kingdom fuelled their anger. If a port town of Zighted was built in Agnes, business rivals would increase. Even the trade with the Zighted merchants would become quite difficult.

These things made them have a clear hostility towards Regin.

In their feelings, there was also contempt towards her. Even when Princess Regin pretended to be a Prince, she did not have conspicuous achievements. Even having been able to come back to the throne was because she was helped by good luck; it was not based on her ability. They were thinking so.

Therefore, they planned a rebellion. Taking back Agnes ceded to Zchted, driving away neighboring countries such as Sachstein and Muozinel and making their rights and interests firm in the marine trade was their purpose.

“I think that taking action would be good.”

The man who was silently hearing the talks of others until then proposed.

“However, I would like to step on the stage if possible. Not to suddenly play a large-scale hand like a rebellion, but to become the first step to it. With a little luck, we could make a bunch of opportunistic lot come to understand us. For the leap in order to soar higher, we must first give raise to the action.”

“I see. But, is there such a hand?”

To the person who turned a skeptical look, the man answered with a cool smile.

“—Durandal.”

That word changed the atmosphere drifting in the place to something tense at a stretch. The man continued without regard to the reactions of the persons present.

We will secretly obtain that treasured sword. Afterwards, it'll be fine if we feign ignorance when asked . What would Her Highness the Princess possibly do with Durandal?

If it came to light that the sacred sword of the Kingdom was stolen, it would become the first crack to Regin's reign. Afterwards, if they "found " the sacred sword, the effect would become much bigger.

"How about it? In this case, we won't need that much manpower. Besides—"

Looking around at the persons present, the man continued with a look and voice as if asking for agreement.

"It wouldn't be good if a sacred sword like Durandal is under that Princess. Don't you think so? I think that that should truly shine on the side of someone with power."

These lines were tinged with a sound which made the feeling of guilt of the people present fade. Several people looked at each other and nodded so as to persuade themselves.

They did not know. This man's true name.

His name which was Charon Anquetil Greast.

They knew the name of Greast, but there were few people who had ever seen his face. This was because Greast was the trusted retainer of Ganelon who was Duke Thenardier's rival.

But, even if they were to discover his true identity, Greast would calmly persuade them. And, he would seize the initiative as if it was a matter of course.

He saw through the superficiality of the persons attending. There was no one here with the ability equal to that of the late Duke Thenardier or Steid.

---To think that I, who was violently attacking them under Duke Ganelon one year ago, am siding with them feigning ignorance. Duke Ganelon told me a really interesting story.

With a joyful smile, Greast was watching the men's situation.

It was Duke Ganelon who found out that there was a plot of rebellion against Regin and had arranged so that Greast could creep into their meeting.

Ganelon himself was not here. There were other things that he had to do; that's why he left here to Greast.

---Now that I had prepared it up to here, I must make it succeed.

Not the wish of those who were here, but Ganelon's and his wish.

First was Durandal. The people who were here were not reliable, but he would try to do it.

A light smile appeared on Greast's lips. He was excited about the confusion which he would cause from here, one by making the country called Brune the stage.

Chapter 4 – Lebus' Daily

With a sour look, Elizavetta Fomina scowled at the old man standing on the opposite side across the work desk. Although being a little skinny, he stretched his back straight and he had also carefully arranged his pure white beard. An unyielding and strong determination overflowed in his eyes.

“Lazare. Are you opposed no matter what?”

“By all means, please reconsider it.”

The old civil official called Lazare so deeply bowed that one wondered whether his forehead was stuck on to the work desk. Elizavetta pouted.

It was about this morning that she returned to the Imperial Palace of Lebus with the soldiers. As she thanked the soldiers for their service, promised them reward and then made them disperse, Elizavetta got through with a bath and took a meal.

After that, she called several subordinates to her office and talked about the conferral of honors regarding this battle, but her opinion and Lazare's was opposed about the reward to Urz.

“Urz’s achievements are certainly not small. However, there are some issues.”

Regarding this war, Urz had two achievements to his credit. The fact that he had seen through about where Ilda was advancing (to Pardu). And the fact that he made the fleeing Ilda fall from his horse.

“Even with just only one of the two is a great achievement.”

Praising him without reservation were Naum and the captains who were leading each squad. They knew well the importance of grasping the enemy’s position. Especially this time, if they were even another day late, Pardu would have been attacked.

Come to think of it, although he came from the work of a stable boy, he should be properly praised.

It was about the fact of having made Ilda fall from his horse, but it was precisely because Urz was the owner of a tremendous bow skill that he could accomplish this. Moreover, he did not kill Ilda.

“Try to the best of your ability to capture him alive” was the royal palace’s request. Since he perfectly responded to it, he should be recompensed with a great reward.

However, this old civil official stubbornly disagreed.

“Urz is a person that Vanadis-sama let go to the front as an exception, and he was only a stable boy a few days ago before going to the front. In the first place, two months have not yet passed since he came to the Imperial Palace.”

As he cut his words for a moment and fixed his breathing, Lazare tightly grasped his fist and resumed his emphasis.

“Certainly the achievements that Urz built are splendid. However, if you highly evaluate him, it will be considered that Vanadis-sama is favoring Urz, right? I do not think that it will be good for Vanadis-sama as well as for Urz. In addition, there is also the relation with Duke Bydgauche. The Duke is a person widely known for his military prowess in the northern part of this Zchted.

However, if you say that he was made fall from his horse by a servant who ascended from being a stable boy, his fame as a warrior will be ruined.”

“His Excellency the Duke had praised Urz’s ability.”

Elizavetta objected so, but far from faltering, Lazare did not shake even a little. He was like a steep cliff which continued to rise even if bathed in a blizzard.

“His Highness the Duke has surely said so. However, what will the people following the Duke think? What is important is that. Aside from saying that Vanadis-sama made the Duke fall from his horse after a one-to-one fight , this was accomplished by a man whose identity is not even certain.”

Ilda’s subordinates did not praise Urz; they would probably regard him as someone who made their master lose face. Lazare asserted so.

“It is probably by chance that Urz was able to make Duke Bydgauche fall from his horse. I thought it would be better to put it in that way. It was a battle done when the day just dawned; in that case, the Duke’s military prowess will not be stained that much too, right?”

The relations between Elizavetta and Ilda were not bad. It might be said that they were rather friendly. For this reason, Ilda also stopped by this Imperial Palace before visiting the capital and Elizavetta also warmly received him.

It was not yet known how King Victor would judge Ilda, either. It is not as if there was no logic at all in Lazare's words.

As Lazare cut his words, the other civil officials nodded many times as to approve of his opinion. There were not only civil officials, but also several knights here, but they were silent and also seemed to be of the same opinion.

Then among the knights, one person raised his voice.

“What Lazare-dono says is quite right, but...”

It was Naum who had made an objection in a moderate tone.

“It's a fact that Urz built achievements. The soldiers who participated in this battle understand it. If he isn't

rewarded with this, Vanadis-sama's dignity will certainly be stained. If it's you, you should understand at least that ."

"I did not say that we should not reward him."

"Then, how much will be appropriate (as a reward)?"

"About 100 silver coins."

Probably having already thought about it, Lazare immediately answered, which caused Naum to be amazed.

"Lazare-dono. Didn't you get the wrong number? As for me, I think that even 1000 pieces of silver coins are few though."

"Then, many people working at the Imperial Palace will harbor discontent. For them, Urz is still a man of unknown identity who works as a stable boy. When Urz has served for a long time, it will be accepted by many people that his identity won't be minded anymore, then you should reward him once again."

"You say that his identity is unknown, but it isn't Urz's fault, right? Many people know the fact that he had

diligently worked as stable boy. Even in this battle, he did nothing which was susceptible to causing problems.”

Naum eagerly argued vehemently, but Lazare did not show signs of changing his stance. The grizzled knight changed his way of doing. With a sarcastic smile, he looked around at the people except Elizavetta.

“One does not evaluate someone who accomplished distinguished services by using his identity and position as a reason. I wonder what the aristocrats and Vanadis of the neighborhood will think if they knew it. Seemingly, there is a group of jealous and coward people formed in Lebus. Wouldn't they laugh so at us?”

As expected, several persons changed their complexion to this utterance and glared at Naum. The grizzled knight did not break his buoyant attitude and looked back at them.

“—Naum. Just now, you said too much.”

Elizavetta's calm voice swept away the serious atmosphere. Naum turned towards the Vanadis and deeply bowed his head. After confirming it, she moved her eyes to the civil officials and other knights.

“Let’s decide that the reward to Urz will be 100 pieces of silver coins.”

Elizavetta said with a solemn face, but her speech did not end by that.

“And then, I shall attach Urz under Naum as an apprentice Knight.”

“An apprentice Knight, you say?”

The old civil official made a bitter face. Elizavetta asked with a dangerous smile.

“Lazare. I have conceded this for you, you know? Given the achievements, even giving 2000 pieces of silver coins to someone of knight’s rank will not be enough.”

If they had let Ilda escaped at that time, the Bydgauche soldiers would not have easily surrendered. In addition, in order to capture Ilda, both Elizavetta and Ellen might not have yet returned to their territories.

“As you wish, Vanadis-sama.”

Although he made a displeased face, it seemed to be within the range of compromise for Lazare. He respectfully bowed.

And then, she moved the talk to what to do about the others' rewards.

At that time, Urz was soundly sleeping in a room given to him. What was good in becoming an attendant was that one might be given a room and bed, three pieces of blankets and a change of clothes only for him.

By the way, he was also given a sword, but it was leaned against the wall and left as such. The bow which he also got from Elizavetta was next to the sword, but one could understand from the gloss of the surface and the state of the cloth wound around the grip that it was properly maintained.

“Being able to sleep without thinking about work is the best.”

After all, when he was a stable boy, it was non stop movement from before daybreak until sunset

Moreover, the more you get used to it, the more work was increased. One could not possibly wish for afternoon naps.

Urz, who was wrapped up in a blanket and was looked at the ceiling which got slightly dirty, suddenly remembered about Ellen and Rurick. About the two people who called him Tigrevurmud Vorn.

“Memory, huh...”

As Urz shook his head, he closed his eyes. He quietly fell asleep.

And it was about the evening of this day that the youth was woken up by Naum, was summoned in the office and given the rank of apprentice knight and 100 pieces of silver coins.

It was seven days after Urz was called by Elizavetta and was given the rank of apprentice knight.

“Ah, you came, Urz.”

Resting both her elbows on the work desk where documents were packed on the side and placing her shapely chin on her overlapping hands, Elizavetta looked up at the youth with a happy smile.

Urz who was led and brought by Naum politely bowed. It was the etiquette taught to him by the grizzled knight standing beside him.

“These several days, what did you do and how did you spend them?”

“I was taught various things by Lord Naum.”

“I taught him the characters and customs of our country. Urz has no memory after all.”

Urz answered and Naum supplemented in a polite attitude.

It was not a lie. It was true that he was taught Zchted's characters and customs.

However unlike Urz, the amount of work which Naum had was not a little. It was another story if he was ordered by Elizavetta, but he could not only care about Urz. Therefore, it was decided that Urz would be taught various things by Naum for only one koku per day.

"It doesn't seem like he could be taught under constant attendance from dusk till dawn though."

It was Naum who hurriedly answered Elizavetta who tilted her head to the side.

"It seems that aside from that, he does training with the bow and take a nap."

"A nap? Every day?"

The eyes which contained doubt being turned towards him, Urz got flustered. He did training with bow and also took a nap, but that was not only it.

Urz toured the town near the castle every day. He intended to investigate about Tigrevurmud Vorn in his own way, but he was interested in the town itself too.

With one piece of silver coin, one could buy a bag packed with as much wild oat as the length of one pair of arms. Or one bottle of first-class honey. One could also get good alcohol and meal in the bars.

Urz wrapped his body in a thick overcoat and walked around the town near the castle. He entered a suitable bar, listened to the poem of minstrels strumming Balalaika^[5] at the roadside, lost his way in the back alley and got involved in a quarrel.

Unfortunately, he kept failing to get any information about Tigrevurmud Vorn. It seemed that the hero of Brune was not so famous in one corner of Zchted. The traveling minstrels said that they had at least heard his name.

But although Urz was discouraged about that, he remembered Elizavetta's face and was relieved at the same time.

As Naum also said, he did not intend to stay in Lebus. But, he understood that Elizavetta took a liking to him. If he was to regain his memory now and leave Lebus, he would make her sad. He was not inclined to do that.

“Nap, huh... Well, it’s fine.”

Saying so, Elizavetta did not try to question any further. Urz bowed his head to his master with a face mixed with confusion and regret. As he thought that he would honestly answer if she had questioned any further, words did not come out.

Removing her chin from her hand and looking up at Tigre, Elizavetta changed the topic.

“I am sorry for not being able to reward you so much in the battle the other day. Weren’t you also dissatisfied?”

“Not really.”

“You should be dissatisfied.”

Sulking as she was peevish, Elizavetta lightly scowled at the youth. Urz thought to say that he had her pat his

head, but he stopped as he vividly envisioned the figure of Elizavetta who got angry with her face bright red.

Elizavetta, not seeming to realize about what Urz was thinking, stood up from the chair of the office.

“I will give you one mission.”

As she stuck out her chest, the red-haired Vanadis said with an exaggerated attitude. Usually, she gave an order with a high-handed attitude towards her subordinates, but she apparently felt like it was not necessary to do so towards Urz.

“As a mediator. I want you to solve a dispute between two villages.”

“...As a mediator?”

To the unexpected order, Urz asked back without hiding his confusion. As for Naum who was standing next to the youth, a feeling of fatigue had already drifted on his face.

---I have never done something like being a mediator, and I have never seen it, either.

He thought so, but when he saw her happy smile, he was not able to say that he could not do it.

Walking about three days along the highway from the Imperial Palace to the east, there were the villages Zabul and Tarnaba. There was a river streaming between these two villages, and the two villages had always quarreled about the use of the river.

They quarreled about the use of the small amount of water in the winter dry season, and during the flood of the river which happened around the end of summer, because the way of using that river was bad, they laid blame on each other. This petition had been sent every year by the village headmen of both villages, and each time, a civil official of the Imperial Palace went to deal with it.

If one had to say why a person of the Imperial Palace went out for just a dispute between villages, it was because these two villages were in a territory under the Vanadis' direct control.

Just like other dukedoms in Zchted, in Lebus also, the persons appointed by the Vanadis become either chiefs or feudal lords and governed cities and towns of every place.

But, in case when quarrel arose in the boundary line of each feudal lord, the quarrel might be prevented by the Vanadis making the whole area under her direct control territory. By herself breaking in, she would avoid a direct conflict between feudal lords.

Urz who was given an explanation up to there cocked his head in puzzlement and asked.

“Why do these villages quarrel?”

Elizavetta chose some documents among those piled up to the side of the work desk and handed them over to Naum. The grizzled knight who quickly looked over them explained on behalf of his master.

“It is said that the Zabul village had extended a large wheat field from summer to autumn. If a field spreads, the amount of water from the river to use will also increase. That incurred the anger of the Tarnaba village.”

In addition, it could not be said that the Zabul village's attitude was good. It was said that towards the complaint of the Tarnaba village, the Zabul village's headman declared this.

“It's all good since you have a mountain, isn't it?”

There was a big mountain extending on the back of the Tarnaba village. The villagers picked edible wild plants and nuts and hunted beasts in warm seasons.

When the people of the Zabul village were going to the mountain, the people of the Tarnaba village accompanied them and collected from 10% to 20% of what they (Zabul people) got. This was not something rare, as for villagers, the mountain was a precious source of income. Despite being the neighboring village, it was intolerable to be damaged by strangers.

However, it was not necessarily a good thing to be near the mountain. If one was to farm on the foot of a mountain, deers and wild boars would come to eat it away. In a severe winter, wolfs and bears which failed to hibernate might also get down the mountain.

Therefore, the people of the Tarnaba flew into rage at the words of the Zabul village.

At the utterance of those among the villagers who tried to avoid every conflict, they decided first to ask for Vanadis-sama's approval, but the two villages were in a situation where it would be not strange if they clashed anytime.

"The population of each village is about 100 people. It's a territory under Vanadis-sama's direct control. If you fail, Vanadis-sama's influence will be damaged (tarnished)."

Naum said with a serious expression.

"Do I have to do it no matter what?"

Urz confirmed that first. He was taught various things, but he naturally had no experience as a mediator. It was too unreasonable to suddenly let him do it.

Elizavetta who sat down on the chair of her office generously nodded.

"Yes. This is an order. If you fail, I will personally deal with it. Do your best so that it doesn't happen."

Seemingly, he could do nothing but obey. Urz answered that he understood.

“Leave in four days at the latest. If there is something you don’t understand, ask Naum. Also when preparing what you need, you should refer to Naum.”

As for Urz, he wanted to ask Naum for teaching even right now, but it seemed that he had another assignment after this. He reluctantly bowed to Elizavetta and left the office.

It was the evening of that day that Urz was able to meet Naum.

In the small training ground in the outskirts of the Imperial Palace, they were talking while training with the bow.

Through the training ground, they were round targets standing at distances of 100, 150 and 200 alsins.

Urz was thankful for the fact that when other people entered the training ground during the training with the bow, there was the rule that they must call out to those who were using it earlier without fail.

This was a measure to prevent accidents where those with poor bow skill shot arrows to those who came to the training ground, but in this case, private talks were not difficult, too.

While shooting an arrow aiming at the mark at the distance of 100 alsins, Naum explained.

“The senior civil officials recommended this matter as harassment to you. Vanadis-sama accepted it as she wanted to let you make a meritorious deed. Even if you fail, you may think that the situation could be settled when Vanadis-sama moved.”

As expected, Naum had examined the circumstances by this time. Standing next to him, Urz sighed while shooting an arrow aiming at the mark at the distance of 200 alsins.

“But, it will be bad if I fail, eh.”

“There is no doubt that Vanadis-sama will be disappointed. The civil officials will probably take this opportunity to drag you down, too. As for me, I want you to succeed if possible.”

Returning a wry smile to Naum who let his bowstring resound while speaking in a way posing as a joke, Urz asked after a little thought.

“If they have recommended it by harassment, is it that difficult?”

“I said that they sent a petition every year, right? Last year and the year before last, the civil official who was dispatched each time wrongly deals with it and rather made the problem worse. Vanadis-sama immediately intercedes, mediated it herself and managed to avoid further problems though. From that, there was the tendency of making light of the civil officials.”

“I see”, Urz was convinced. Not only would they make Urz fail, but it was also a good opportunity to display Elizavetta’s dignity to the territory's people.

“What do you say? Can you do it?”

A faint irritation was mixed in Naum's voice. This knight did not seem to be that good in archery. Of the six arrows he shot, five stuck in the mark which he aimed at, whereas the nearly twenty arrows Urz had shot were all right on the mark. Sticking that many arrows would probably need technique.

Lowering his bow, Urz said while staring at the mark.

"So, I can ask you to tell me how to solve it."

"Sorry."

Naum smiled wryly.

"Normally, you might have used that hand. It isn't shameful to follow successful examples of guide in such things. But when restricting to this time, if it comes to light by some chance, it will become troublesome in various ways."

Those who harbored antipathy toward Urz would be going to evaluate the youth low using it as a reason. Urz changed his question.

“Does master think that I will succeed in solving this matter?”

“She probably expects it.”

To Naum's answer, Urz shrugged his shoulders. If he said that she thought so, it was probably right. Even the fact that if Urz was to fail, she would directly settle it, there was no doubt that she said it seriously. At least, it was not irresponsible.

---Well, these several days, I played around and visited several places ...

Besides, he should probably try to do anything in order to regain his memory.

Removing the arrow which he was about to nock on the bow, Urz looked at Naum.

“Was it Zabul and Tarnaba? I want to know a bit more about these two villages. Anything you can recall about the two villages will be all right, so can you show it to me?”

To Urz's sudden request, Naum turned a gaze which mixed interest with amazement.

"You casually say anything, but for how many dozens of years do you intend to see? It will take quite time just to prepare them, you know?"

"If I want them by this time tomorrow, how many years would you be able to prepare?"

"...I would say about three or four years. I will be working all the day though."

While patting the wrinkles of his face, Naum answered with a wry face. He must be already imagining himself fighting with a large quantity of documents. Urz turned around to Naum and bowed his head.

"Please. Even how I would answer to master will depend on it, so..."

"Understood."

Answering so, Naum gave the bow which he was holding to Urz. He smiled at the youth who was bewildered.

“Please put this away. You can do at least this much, right?”

As Urz nodded, Naum turned his back and left the training ground at a quick pace.

As his figure went away, Urz realized a certain thing. He turned his eyes to the direction where the target (mark) was. By tidying up in this training ground, he meant that Urz had to collect the arrows which pierced the marks and the arrows which fell on the ground. The winter sky was rapidly darkening.

It seemed that it would become an uphill task.

As he said, Naum prepared the necessary documents by the evening of the next day. His face was somewhat haggard, but Urz decided to act as if he saw nothing and received the documents.

The youth secluded himself in his room, lighted the candlestick which he had borrowed and looked over the documents. He checked the population of each village,

the number of young men and the damages (harms) which occurred so far, and put his thoughts in order.

When he discovered the information which he wanted to know above all, Urz unintentionally shifted his attention to the bow which he had leaned against the wall. The prospect of a solution was in sight.

The next day, Urz visited Naum and asked for the necessary things.

Twenty old soldiers. Enough equipment and outfit for cold weather for them. Food as well. As he finally remembered, the youth added.

“Oh, and five arrows made of iron sickles... No, can you prepare ten of them?”

And the morning of the next day. Urz left the Imperial Palace with 20 old soldiers.

Elizavetta wanted to see off the youth, but she restrained herself. If she, who was a Vanadis, was to come see off a specific retainer, she would have to do the same also when other people would leave the Imperial Palace on an official business. The circumstances would be different if Urz was not a retainer.

---Do your best, Urz.

While processing the state affairs in her office, the red-haired Vanadis sent him words of encouragement from the bottom of her heart.

“By the way, how many days did you give to that youth to finish the mediation and return to the Imperial Palace?”

It was in the afternoon of the day when Urz left the Imperial Palace, that Lazare who visited the office asked Elizavetta so. “That youth” he referred to was of course Urz.

“It’s unusual for you to be interested in such a thing, Lazare.”

“Among the civil officials and knights, there are some who get excited.”

The old civil official answered with a bitter face as tough as it was deplorable.

“In addition, the amount of trouble he will have or what sort of failures he will cause, that’s called worthless

interests. What on earth do you think political affairs to be?"

A vein popping on her forehead, Lazare looked at the Vanadis who was his master with a disappointed face.

"I also have a responsibility in it for not stopping them, realizing their folly, but there is also you, Vanadis-sama. Why did you leave it to that youth?"

"Of course, it's because I think that Urz will be able to do it."

"Even if he skillfully handles a bow, it won't help him this time. In the first place, something like mediation eagerly soothing both opposing parties, hears both claims well and examines them closely, starts appealing to reason and persuades them, displays gains and loss and calls for compromise and consent. If there are those who don't hear the story, or those who come in a group and threaten, there are also those who will send a bribe. Moreover, when it comes to a petition of those two villages, for that youth who had no experience as mediator, it will be more than being burdensome, won't it?"

To the old civil official who insisted lengthily, Elizavetta turned a surprised gaze. It sounded to her like Lazare was sympathizing with Urz.

“But, Urz says that there is a chance of success. He said that he will return in ten days.”

As Elizavetta answered in a bullish tone, Lazare narrowed his eyes suspiciously.

There was a distance of three days on foot from this Imperial Palace to the two villages. So, it would take six days by going and coming.

In other words, Urz intended to end the negotiations in four days.

“He takes mediation too lightly. At least, I want him to make this failure a source of encouragement.”

Lazare shook his head and sighed.

He seemed to think that four days would be enough time, but it was not like that. If it was something which

could be discussed for several days and come to an agreement, then there was no way the petition would have arrived until Elizavetta.

“I believe in Urz. If he really settles it in ten days and comes back, I will give him a reward that I want this time for sure.”

“If that happens, we will have to recognize his ability, too.”

After Lazare left, Elizavetta who, as expected, felt anxious called Naum.

“I hear that the topic about Urz’s mediation is now the hot topic in the Imperial Palace.”

“Yes. I bet on the fact that he will settle it and return in ten days.”

The grizzled knight plainly answered, leaving the Vanadis who was his master dumbfounded.

“Are you doing a bet?”

“Although it’s to the extent of one or two cups of Vodka between several people. To state the current

situation, I was the only one who thought that he will settle it.”

“...Do you think that Urz can do it?”

When Elizavetta asked with an anxious expression, Naum tilted his head to the side as if thinking.

“I cannot assert, but... I don't think that Urz underestimates mediation as everyone thinks. I think that he has a firm idea and is acting based on it.”

This is not a means to make Elizavetta feel relieved, but what Naum felt after having talked with Urz. It was also so in the war against Ilda, but that youth had too much composure. Just like a General of one army who got through (overcame) many fighting scenes.

Naum thought. It was said that Tigrevurmud Vorn was a noble who had a territory. In that case, wouldn't he have experienced mediation like this time many times as a feudal lord?

And, if Urz was Tigrevurmud Vorn and if that experience remained in the corner of the memory.

“We have already sent him out, so let's wait for the result. Urz will not disappoint Vanadis-sama.”

Naum concealed the thought in his mind and said only that.

And ten days later. Urz returned to the Imperial Palace with the 20 old soldiers as planned.

One corner of the Imperial Palace was filled with astonishment.

Except Naum, there was no one among civil officials and knights who thought that Urz would return as planned. Even that Naum, when he heard the report that the mediation was solved safely, he was surprised to the extent that he had dropped the documents which he had in his hands.

“Thank you for your work, Urz. Could you tell me how you solved it?”

In the office, Elizavetta received Tigre with a smile on her whole face. Both Lazare and Naum were standing beside her. The old civil official stared at Urz with an expression showing that it was hard for him to believe it, and Naum's face was filled with admiration.

When Urz bowed, he explained how he went through with the mediation.

Where the youth went with the soldiers first was in neither of the two villages, but at the river which flowed between them. In staying there, he stood watch so that the people of the two villages did not run wildly.

Moreover, he made two groups of three soldiers each go towards the two villages and summon the village chiefs and the village headmen. If he had visited either of the villages earlier, the other one would probably have harbored dissatisfaction and he might be suspected of whether they exchanged any secret agreement. Thus, he showed that he partially dealt with the two villages.

As he gathered the village chiefs and headmen of the two villages, Urz began mediation.

Meeting with the opposing partner face to face, they did not try to hide their displeasure to each other, but though old, twenty soldiers gave a quite overpowering feeling. They reluctantly followed Urz's instruction.

Urz once again heard both sides' claims and corrected them if there was a mistake.

"Don't you have any more to say?"

Asking many times as to confirm, the youth declared when each other's claims were all out.

"The Zabul village should hand over 10% of the harvest from their expanded field to the Tarnaba village. And when a person of the Zabul village entered the mountain, the Tarnaba village should keep less than 10% in the proportion of the prey which he got. About the use of the river, don't we have to decide here on how many fishes, and up to how many cups of water for a bucket per day?"

The people of both villages shook their heads and declared that they would follow Urz's decision.

But then, a person of the Tarnaba village said to Urz.

“Mr. Official. There is one request I would like you to hear.”

The villager's request was that he wanted him to get rid of the bear which was in the mountain. It was said that this bear was an owner of a huge body, and when it occasionally came down to the foot of the mountain, it ate away the crops of the field and left.

“It settled only with crops for now, but we don't know when it will begin to eat pigs and chickens. People of the village shudder in fear whether they might also be attacked. You have gathered this many brave soldiers. And you carry a splendid bow on your shoulder. Could you do it?”

The villager's tone was provocative. The thought “as if we will bear to be underestimated by such a youngster” was overflowing from both eyes. The people of the Zabul village were also happily looking at this. They were also holding a similar thought towards Urz.

Urz, showing no signs of flinching, plainly nodded.

“Can you tell me the details?”

And, Urz who heard the bear's concrete size and the place where he was often seen entered the mountain on the day and killed the bear in three days. By himself.

What Urz wanted to know to the point that he had Naum prepared documents was how much harm from the beasts the Tarnaba village which was near the mountain received. As expected, the Tarnaba village had received damages from a wild boar and bear several times per year.

Therefore, when mediating, Urz carried his bow on his shoulder so that they could see it.

They were people who made light of civil officials. If he displayed a bow like this, they could not help checking whether or not it was a bluff. Moreover, he was accompanied by a group of old soldiers.

The youth's reading that they would surely request something as a trial of strength proved right.

He made the people of the Tarnaba village help drag the bear from the mountain and made the people of the Zabul village help with the work to deal with it. When the work of that was over, dissatisfaction vanished from their faces.

The people of the Tarnaba village knew the terror of a wild boar and bear as being a daily thing. The Zabul village by no means thought that it was somebody else's problem, since they sometimes used the mountain.

Therefore, the hunter who killed a bear all alone became the target of respect and awe. At this point, youth and position were no longer a problem. Given the situation, even the old soldiers seemed to wear grimness.

The next day, when he made the people of the village swear once again so as to follow what they were told, Urz left the two villages with the soldiers.

“—That's all.”

As Urz said so and completed his report, Lazare leaked a groan of admiration.

When hearing the report, this government affair seemed to be something quite suitable for Urz.

But, it did not. This youth cleared it up in the easier way for him. If he was not good at bow, but with a sword, he would probably think about a method to solve it by utilizing it.

Elizavetta greatly nodded with a contented smile and loudly told.

“Now, I shall give a reward of 1000 pieces of silver coins to Urz. And, I decided to make the room next to my bedroom yours.”



Shock ran through the office. Not only Lazare, but also Naum stared wide-eyed.

Giving the room next to hers was a reward which showed the greatest reliance. Unless one was considered to excel not only in ability, but also in character, he would not be given a room immediately near that of the lord.

“Vanadis-sama. As expected, that is—”

Lazare appealed with a pallid face. However, Elizavetta shook her head and turned it down.

“I should have said it. That if he returns in ten days, I will give a reward of my choice. You have also consented to it, haven't you? Isn't it cowardly to raise an objection now?”

“Certainly, I made a wrong judgment about this youth's ability. And I did not forget Vanadis-sama's words and my words, either. However, that reward is too big. Please , reconsider it.”

A Sweat of distress blurred on the forehead of the old civil official who desperately bowed his head. The

Vanadis with eyes of different colors were turned to the grizzled knight standing still next to Lazare.

“...What is your thought about this, Naum?”

Naum skimmed the wrinkles of his face with a troubled face. Even he was thinking that this reward was too much.

However, he also understood Elizavetta's feelings.

She was desperate to hold onto Urz.

Besides, she at least went through the procedure of imposing on him a mission and rewarding him for his achievements.

Above all, it was clearly the civil officials' blunder this time. Lazare underrated saying that there was no way that the mediation would succeed, and did not even propose to decide about a reward beforehand just in case it was to succeed.

But, it was not also good to leave it as is. He kept a tone calm as much as possible and said.

“Vanadis-sama’s feeling where she evaluates a retainer’s achievement and tries to reward him is noble. However, I also think, how about reconsidering the reward.”

Elizavetta’s expression turned cloudy. Naum continued.

“Then, I will suggest this. How about giving some assignments to Urz, giving the room next to yours for only three months and seeing how it will be?”

“Three months...”

Elizavetta lost herself in her thought. While looking at such a master, Naum thought that this was probably far off. After talking with Lazare, she decided to assign various work to Urz for three months and the room was undoubtedly in a largely empty state.

Elizavetta might be angry, but if Urz’s position stabilized by managing many assignments, dissatisfaction would subside sooner or later. Naum himself thought that he wanted Urz to be in this Imperial Palace. It was for Elizavetta primarily, but he did not dislike this youth, too.

As the issue was settled, Elizavetta turned her gaze to Urz.

“Then, Urz. I will give you the room next to my bedroom for three months from today on. Your duty — your post will be, let’s see, how about something like the Vanadis' adviser?”

Naum and Lazare looked at each other. Adviser in the Imperial Palace was an honorary post; it was not a regular work and it was similar to having no power. But in return, authority was given each time to the one acting as an adviser as necessary. In this case, it came from the Vanadis.

As for Urz, after finishing his report, he was standing silently. Since it was a situation where he received the reward, he was striving so as not to interfere needlessly, but he could not deny that his look which gazed at the three people was half amazed. He thought that he wanted them to at least decide it beforehand.

However, in those words of Elizavetta, as expected he looked at Naum with eyes containing confusion. He silently asked him whether he might accept it.

Instead of answering Urz, Naum bowed to Elizavetta with an exaggerated gesture. Lazare also followed it.

“We also think that it will be all right like that.”

“...I have the feeling that I was made to ride on this (tricked).”

Elizavetta muttered as she looked at the two men with a side glance, but not saying any more than that, she turned a smile to Urz. The youth felt grateful and bowed.

“I will gratefully receive it.”

Thus, Urz became an apprentice knight and the Vanadis adviser. It was an exceptional promotion.

On that day too, Urz quickly finished his breakfast and was going to go to the castle town. A few days had passed since he became the Vanadis adviser, but as usual, there was no work which looked like work.

It was when he was walking along the corridor to go outside that Elizavetta called out to him.

“Ara, Urz. Where are you going wearing an overcoat?”

As he looked back to the familiar voice, the red-haired Vanadis wearing a purple dress was standing. She was alone with no one following her. Urz was about to open his mouth to try to fool her, but Elizavetta cheerfully smile and said earlier than it.

“Speaking of which, it seems that you go out to the castle town almost every day.”

He intended to hide it, but it looked like he was found out. His master's eyes were not laughing.

“I think that if I see various things in the castle town, I can get an opportunity to recover my memory.”

As Urz made an excuse, Elizavetta became silent.

She did not want, more so than anyone, for the youth to recover his memory. This was because if he was to recover his memory, Urz would not be Urz anymore. But , she could not voice out her thought.

Urz misunderstood that his master's silence meant that she was angry. After a little thought, he suggested.

“Do you also go out to the castle town, master?”

“For the inspection or something? No.”

Elizavetta who pulled herself together shook her head with a curt reply.

“If I am to go for inspection, then I will have certainly gone with 20 guards. Not only do I not allow those whom I've selected beforehand to come closer, (but) no one else can accost me either. Of course, I know the importance of inspection, but it is suffocating. A walk is far better.”

If she attached one or two horsemen for strolling, it could not be said that it was so noisy. Even though going out to the town was very free compared to the inspection. This was because the previous Vanadis liked to stroll by going alone on horseback, and they were a few points for which Elizavetta was thankful to the previous Vanadis.

To his master who made a displeased face, Urz said with an expression like a child who thought of a prank.

“How about slipping outside incognito?”

Elizavetta stared wide-eyed with her eyes of different colors.

That day also, Elizavetta was tidying up the documents in her office from morning. By the way, it was Naum who was helping her today.

When noon came, she said that she will rest a little and went back to her bedroom.

“Understood. Meanwhile, I will do the reception”

Naum saw off his master with a respectful attitude.

Elizavetta returned to her bedroom, but although she crept in the bed with canopy, she did not lie down like that. Her eyes were shining with expectation, excitement and tension.

In the bed as it is, she changed into clothes which she had prepared beforehand.

It was clothes for a maid composed of a skirt with black long sleeves and which reached up to her feet, and a white apron. By wrapping her head with a dust cloth afterward, the first disguise would be completed.

As she firmly tied the black whip which was her Dragonic Tool on her thigh, Elizavetta slipped out from the bed. She walked up to the door and carefully inquired about any presence outside. Judging that there was no one, she went out to the corridor.

In the posture of looking down, she walked down the corridor at a quick pace. She passed by soldiers and maids on the way, but she was not hailed.

As she walked until near the rampart surrounding the Imperial Palace, Elizavetta stopped for a moment. Her breathing was rough. Her heart was beating fast. When she touched her cheeks, they took on heat.

When she looked up, the blue sky where clouds were sparsely dispersed spread out. Although the wind was cold, it was fine weather. The white sun and blue sky seemed like they were supporting (backing) her.

It was the first time that she disguised herself as maid and slipped out of the Imperial Palace. The only other persons who knew about this were Urz who originally proposed it and Naum who had cooperated with him.

When Urz recommended slipping out incognito, Elizavetta did not nod immediately.

“But, I will be scolded.”

The words which came out of her mouth at that time were quite childish. Urz laughed and responded. “Then at that time, I will be scolded in your stead”, he said.

Rather than the front gate, she went by the small gate of the Imperial Palace that the maids used.

Urz was waiting there. Catching sight of him, Elizavetta heaved a sigh of relief. The youth said with a smile.

“Well then, shall we go?”

It was in a small hotel (inn) that she was taken to first.

“It’s because those clothes were necessary to slip out of the Imperial Palace, but once you come out to the town, those clothes will be rather conspicuous.”

Renting a room in the inn, Elizavetta changed into the clothes which Urz had prepared.

The hempen cloth with double weaving was slightly tight around her chest. On top of it, she put on a white overcoat which treated fur to the collar and cuffs. As expected, she also wore leather boots using fur.

---It’s been a long time since I’ve wear such a thing.

Before becoming Vanadis, such clothes were natural. While looking at the mirror which Naum prepared beforehand, she covered her left eye with an eye patch. The eye patch was white as to match with the overcoat. Since her Rainbow Eyes stood out no matter what, she decided to attach an eye patch after discussing.

She put on a woolen white hat and tucked away her red hair in that. A decoration which lined up many small balls on the hat was hanging. Seemingly, it was in order not to let the eye patch stand out.

“...This is me.”

Looking at herself reflected in the mirror, Elizavetta vacantly muttered. Probably because she got used to seeing herself dressed in a gorgeous purple dress, her sober appearance was fresh.

She came out of the room. Urz who saw Elizavetta's figure smiled.

“How is it?”

“Let's see. It's slightly tight, but it isn't as if I can't bear it.”

Since it was embarrassing to speak about where it was tight, she dodged (skipped) it.

“With this, you will not be seen as a Vanadis.”

Urz said so and turned his back on Elizavetta. The red-haired Vanadis became displeased.

“Don't you have anything else to say?”

She frankly vented her dissatisfaction. When Urz dubiously looked back, he cocked his head in

puzzlement as he did not seem to understand. Elizavetta sighed. She walked quickly, passed Tigre and turned around.

“Take me quickly.”

They watched a street performance which blew up smoke of many colors from hands. They listened to a minstrel's song and a heartwarming story of a villager and a fairy. They ate boiled potatoes and smoked meat at a stall.

Housewives came and went in the main street and children ran with a dog. A man who looked like a craftsman was drinking vodka at the roadside. In the garden of a house, there was an old man who was maintaining a gusli^[6]. Merchants raised their voices by the way where stalls were lined up, and if there were lovers who bantered, there were also youths who seriously appraised.

It was lively and peaceful.

“You have really gone to various places, eh.”

Urz took Elizavetta to various places and showed her various things to the extent that she was amazed and said so. All the expenses were in Urz's charge.

Elizavetta's cheeks loosened and her heart was bouncing. No matter what she saw was fresh. One was not bothered even by the cold wind if he drank soup sold in a porcelain bowl.

Above all, Urz was next to her. He ate the same thing and watched the same thing.

When about one koku and a half passed, both of them decided to enter a suitable vacant land (lot) and rest a little. In a circular plaza surrounded by trees, things which were carefully shaved stumps were in place instead of chairs.

"I will buy some drinks."

As she saw off Urz who said so and walked at a quick pace, Elizavetta leaned on a nearby tree. She exhaled a little and softly touched the eye patch which covered her left eye.

---Shall I take it off a little?

She understood that it was necessary, but this eye patch was a hindrance (in the way) after all.

She wanted to watch this scenery with both eyes.

---It's all right. After all, Urz is there.

She took off the eye patch. It was at that time that a rude voice was applied to Elizavetta.

“Hey, you. Don't you want to drink with me from now on?”

Footsteps were getting closer and an unknown man stood before the red-haired Vanadis. He was in his mid-twenties. He was wearing a slightly dirty overcoat and he hung many small bags (sachets) to the belt of his waist. Since he was speaking with the Asvarre accent, it looked like it was a traveler.

Elizavetta whose fun time was interrupted returned words in anger.

“I'm in a good mood now. So leave before spoiling my mood.”

The man seemed to be taking her words as bluff. He reached out his hand to Elizavetta with an indecent smile . The red-haired Vanadis violently brushed away his hand.

The man's finger which was brushed away hit Elizavetta's hat and the hat fell to the ground.

Her red hair rapidly spread, and her pair of eyes of different colors was exposed in front of the man. The man stared at Elizavetta with eyes as if looking at something strange and groaned low.

It was in an instant that her anger reached the outburst . Elizavetta tightly grasped the eye patch with her left hand and grabbed the man's face with her right hand. She mercilessly flung the man against the ground.

“Master!?”

A shout of surprise startled Elizavetta who heavily breathed. Urz who held porcelain cups in both hands rushed over. Running his eyes over Elizavetta and the man lying on the ground, the youth roughly guessed the circumstances. Fortunately, it seemed that the man only lost consciousness.

As Urz put the two porcelain cups on the stump nearby, he picked up the hat, removed the soil and put it on Elizavetta's head. He put his hand on her back and left the place. Since the street was conspicuous, they entered a thin byroad.

“...Why? Why do I have to feel something like this?”

Holding her left eye, the girl of Rainbow Eyes shed tears. Dark, gloomy feelings wrapped her. The fact that it occurred at a defenseless moment when she was immersed in happiness further deepened her wound.

“Calling it a good omen is a lie. If I scoop out such a thing...”

Probably because her feelings were highly strung, she said such an absurd thing. Urz said while stopping her.

“I like master's eyes.”

Silence fell.

After a pause, Elizavetta timidly (nervously) asked.



“...How do you like it?”

“I think that you are you precisely because of those eyes of two colors.”

To Elizavetta who sank into silence, Urz continued.

“When I said before that master’s eyes were like that those of a cat, master laughed. If not for those eyes, I would not have voiced out my impression right? Of course, I think that there are also times when they gave you an unpleasant feeling. But...”

There, Urz cut his speech for a moment. This was because Elizavetta looked up at the youth with a serious look. There were traces of tears on her cheeks and the surroundings of her eyes turned red, but tears were no longer overflowing from her eyes.

“Urz. Why do you call me “master”?”

“Had I by any chance hurt your feelings?”

Urz cocked his head in puzzlement to the sudden question. Elizavetta answered without changing her expression at all.

“Then, you should have said it sooner. —Other people don’t call me so, right?”

Vanadis-sama. Even Naum called Elizavetta so. It was also so with the Bydgauche soldiers whom they met in the battle the other day. It was rather Urz who was strange.

However, when Urz called Elizavetta “master”, there was not a condescending posture of a servant directed towards his master there.

“There is no particular reason (behind it). When I met master, I did not know about the Vanadis.”

Disappointment and discouragement floated in the girl’s pupils of different colors. Not noticing it, the youth continued.

“Besides, even if I have come to serve you, I did not know what happened after this. So, I decide not to think at all about (my) position or such things and just think ‘I will serve this person’. If it is about this way of calling, I call only master so...”

Again, Urz cut his words. This was because Elizavetta looked downward and shook her shoulders. As he thought that it was disrespectful after all, the young Vanadis adviser became anxious. She did not say that he hurt her feelings, but that was before getting to know the reason.

As he hesitated to ask what was wrong and was silently watching her, Elizavetta heaved a grand sigh after a long silence. And then, she strongly wiped her face with the sleeve of her overcoat.

When she raised her face like that, a smile had returned to Elizavetta's face. The traces of tears had disappeared, but probably because she rubbed them with the sleeve of overcoat, her cheeks had dyed red.

"It's time to go back, Urz."

"Understood."

While being relieved for the fact that Elizavetta's mood was well, Urz replied with a smile. There was still time until sunset, but if she was satisfied, then they should go back.

Coming out to the street, the two people began to walk. However, before they reached ten steps, Elizavetta turned her gaze to a certain stall, and she began to walk there as she seemed to bear interest. Urz could not help following her.

It was a shop which treated ornaments. Though ornaments, neither silver nor gold were used, wooden chips were sharpened, and it decorated with well polished stones and a small amount of copper. Therefore, the price was not so high.

On a blanket instead of a sheet, hairpin and necklace, and rings and bracelets lined up. The man of the shop friendly smiled at Elizavetta.

“Aren't you a lovely young lady? Shouldn't you buy her something here as a man?”

When Urz returned a smile to the man, he nodded to Elizavetta.

“Please, choose what you like”

“T-Then, that...”

It was a necklace which lined up nuts and small stones that the confused Elizavetta pointed at. The nuts and stones were well polished; the nuts were painted in blue and the stones in yellow.

“Thanks as usual. You should apply it on the young lady.”

While receiving a silver coin, the man handed the necklace to Urz. The youth thought that he seemed to be somehow misunderstanding, but Elizavetta did not deny in particular and silently looked at Urz.

“...I will put it on.”

As he said timidly, Elizavetta silently straightened her back and stuck out her chest. Urz took the hand holding the necklace to her neck. Her white throat looked charming. He put (set) a small clasp with a click sound behind her neck.

“It really suits you well.”

Urz said with a smile. It was not flattery. As soon as it was decorated around her neck, it seemed to shine to the extent that it could not be compared to when it was lined up on the blanket.

But, Elizavetta looked away in a huff.

“Even though you said nothing when I wore these clothes.”

By this time, Urz was made to realize his blunder. The man of the shop which was hearing the conversation burst into laughter without reservation.

When the day was about to set, Elizavetta was in her bedroom in the Imperial Palace. She had Naum opened the back gate of the Imperial Palace and she safely came back from there. Thanks to Urz having attracted the soldiers' attention, she was not found by anybody.

Telling the maids that she took a rest early today, she crept in her bed that had a canopy.

---I'm tired.

It was a pleasant fatigue accompanied with joy. Elizavetta brought the necklace of nuts and stones (jewels?) before her eyes. She gently grasped the necklace with both hands and embraced it.

Before long, the Vanadis began to leak the breathing of a happy sleeper.

The day had already sunk and stars were twinkling in the sky.

In the corner of one bar, five men were around an old table and were putting on gloomy faces. Other tables were lively, but the atmosphere was different only here.

Four bottles of wine were put on the table, but three of them were already emptied. Besides, there was a big plate where dried fish, cheese and thinly sliced pork meat were put.

“Speaking of which, did you hear? It seems that he is an adviser this time. That boy.”

One tightly grasped a wine cup and spat out a poisonous-looking voice. Some people sneered.

“So, he became adviser just by having settled only one mediation. It looks like he sold a great deal of flattery.”

“This is definitely a man of unknown birth. If I had settled the mediation, becoming a commanding officer of 1000 horsemen would be assured.”

“Even though he is just a stable boy. I wonder what the old knights and civil officials are doing.”

As they violently gulped down the wine, they severally cursed Urz while biting dried fish and cheese.

They were knights working in the Imperial Palace. There were people in their mid-twenties that seized their current position after overcoming many trials without missing training for sword and spear. All the more, their self-confidence was strong, and they harbored jealousy and antipathy towards Urz who had none of such things and whom the Vanadis took a liking to.

By the way, Naum knew that there were people like them, but as long as they did not state their complaint from the front, he would leave them alone without also blaming them. No matter how many deeds of arms Urz piled up, there would be always such people. This was because he knew that.

“He is good at archery, and then what? His skill with a sword or spear can be said to be below that of a child.”

“Really, look at his mug like a countryman. His birth won't surely be something anyway, too.”

Partly because they got drunk, they did not know how to limit their grumbling and complaints. Moreover, when the scope of their alcohol-filled thoughts were lined up with slander..., they were suddenly called out from the side.

“—if you don't like so much that man, why not get rid of him once and for all?”

They turned suspicious gazes to that direction. An old woman with a small stature, who wrapped her body with a comfortable black robe and put on a hood with the same color over her eyes, was standing there. She was so

short as to be mistaken for a child and she was dragging the hem of her robe on the floor. Her face was not visible and only her long hooked nose stuck out from her hood. She was holding a broom of poor structure in her hand.

“What, it’s only an old woman.”

One of the knights looked at the old woman with unpleasant eyes. The old woman wore a strange atmosphere to the extent that one could understand even drunk. The old woman leaked a muffled laughter.

“If you hate him that much, you should just kill that Urz person.”

To the old woman that was lightly instigating murder, the knights look at each other. They were harboring hostility towards Urz and were thinking that they went through misfortune, but they had not arrived until the state of mind that they wanted to kill him.

But, in the old woman’s words, there was something which strangely made one want to listen to her. Not trying to leave their seats, they intently stared at the old woman and continued hearing her words.

And when they suddenly came to their senses, the old woman's figure had disappeared somewhere.

The night of a day when many days had passed since they slipped out incognito, Urz was appointed the lookout of Elizavetta's bedroom. However, it was limited to one night. It was by the arrangement of Naum and the old civil official Lazare.

“Why me?”

To Naum who ordered the lookout, it was what Urz asked at the very beginning.

For the lookout for Elizavetta's bedroom, someone who was steady in identity and ability was chosen. The youth knew at least that.

The pessimistic knight made an unusually serious face and answered.

“I cannot say it aloud, but Vanadis-sama does not seem to sleep very much these several days. According to the court lady, she has apparently been having dreams and nightmares.”

Urz nodded as he consented. Urz also noticed that Elizavetta's complexion was not good recently. But, he once had inquired and he had seen her condition since his inquiry was dodged.

“I prepared medicine, but she did not drink it. Before she greatly upsets her physical condition, we would like to take measures. If you act as lookout, she may sleep soundly at ease. Lazare-dono also cooperated when I said so.”

“Understood. But, will I, who cannot use the sword, be fit for a watch?”

To Urz who cocked his head in puzzlement, Naum answered with a face which seemed to want to say that there was no problem.

“If it's a short bow, you can handle it in a small corridor, right? If someone suspicious approaches, you can call out to him to hail him. But if he still doesn't do it, I don't mind if you shoot at him.”

It was such a violent talk that Urz was amazed, but if it was lookout, that much might be better.

Anyway, by such circumstances, Urz stood in the corridor at midnight with a short bow. Since the corridor was cold, he had not worn armor, but a hat with fur and an overcoat. This overcoat was threefold; therefore it was a little heavy, but firmer than poor leather armor.

A torch lit with fire was placed on the wall immediately nearby. Not to let this fire extinguish was also the duty of lookout.

When there would be something up and when he would be called by Elizavetta, he was told to contact the court lady who was staying in a separate room, but time only passed by without such an opportunity. The cold became severe and silence increased.

Exactly how much time had passed?

Suddenly, Urz knitted his brows. It seemed that he hear a voice from somewhere.

---*What is it...?*

He reflexively lowered his waist and pricked up his eyes. He immediately understood. That voice was heard from behind him — Elizavetta's bedroom.

What was strange was that it did not seem to be clear words. For example, if she woke up at midnight and called the court lady, a more clear voice should be heard.

But, her voice seemed to groan and moreover, it was intermittent.

Naum's words that Elizavetta was making nightmares crossed his mind.

He was perplexed as whether he should call the court lady or himself should take a look at the situation. However, Urz immediately changed his thought, lighted a spare torch and grasped it with his left hand.

He opened the door with his right hand and slipped his body in.

There was a bed with a canopy at the center of the bedroom. A candlestick was put on the side and a small fire was lit on the candles.

“—Master.”

The answer was neither a reprimand nor an angry voice, but an inarticulate groan. Urz rushed over quickly to the bed with canopy.

“Forgive my rudeness!”

Urz who rolled up the shroud of the canopy stared wide-eyed in surprise.

Elizavetta held her chest and had an anguished expression. From her mouth, painful sighs (breaths) leaked with groans. Sweat blurred on both her beautiful face and body, and several red hairs stuck on her forehead. Her night-clothes opened and exposed her white skin.

As Urz hung the torch on the candlestick, he gripped Elizavetta's shoulders and shook her.

“Master!”

He desperately called out to her. Elizavetta's hands struggled in the air and she grabbed the edge of the bed. When the edge broke, Urz did not know right away.

Elizavetta's right hand touched Urz's face. At the same time, she thinly opened her eyes.

After a little while, the red-haired Vanadis leaked a sigh which contained puzzlement. Her gold and blue eyes vacantly looked up at the youth.

"Urz...?"

"Did you come to yourself?"

Urz took a breath of relief. Then, as he noticed that he was holding Elizavetta's shoulders, he hurriedly released them. He was about to open his mouth to explain to her, who was dumbfounded, what happened, and unintentionally stared fixedly at her figure.

The fire of the candlestick was dimly lighting the bed with canopy. Her night-clothes which used black silk and treated laces were rolled up until her rich bosom were clinging to her body which got wet with sweat.

Her breathing was still rough and her somewhat languid expression let one feel fascination. Dregs (remains) of sweat blurred on her white skin and it looked extremely sensational (lascivious). Her shapely thighs

which drew exquisite curves from her thin waists and continued down were dazzling to the eyes.

When Elizavetta pinched and raised the edge of her night-clothes, Urz's body finally moved. He hurriedly turned away his face which became bright red and put back the shroud of the canopy.

“Um... Are you feeling all right?”

Although he somehow squeezed out his voice, he was inwardly in a state of mind where he wanted to run right now. It seemed that she was having a nightmare. He should have left it to the court lady from the beginning.

There was no reply. As he could not leave without hearing anything, Urz stood near the canopy and quietly waited. After a little while, Elizavetta called Urz.

“...Urz. Did I say anything?”

“No. You seemed to have a nightmare, but you said no meaningful words.”

“Really?”

Urz was surprised and unintentionally stared at the canopy. He did not think that she would insist on it.

“Really.”

A tenuous voice saying “is that so” could be heard. While being perplexed, Urz asked.

“Shall I tell the court lady to prepare water or wine?”

“I don’t want it. More importantly, there is a towel there, right? Please wipe my back.”

Being ordered in a natural tone, Urz uttered an idiotic voice saying “huh?”. He blinked several times and timidly confirmed so as to accurately understand the contents.

“You mean calling the court lady to do that, right?”

“I’m fine with you. I’m cold. Do it quickly.”

Urz was at a loss for words, but he could easily imagine how he would incur his master’s anger if he was to leave here. He reluctantly picked up the towel on the table. A question suddenly sprung out.

---Why was something like this put here?

If there was no plan to use it, it would not have been expressly put there. “Excuse me”, Urz said and he quietly rolled up the canopy.

Elizavetta had already turned her back to him. She had apparently taken off her night-clothes, and her white back was naked. She also spread (threw) her red hair which reached to her waist from her shoulders to the front.

「あなたでいいわ。寒いので。早くなさい」



Urz unintentionally swallowed his saliva in strain and slight excitement, and he was inwardly confused as to whether that sound (of swallowing saliva) was not heard by Elizavetta.

And then, he was relieved in the fact that she had turned her back.

At least, she had probably not noticed about the reaction of his body. If he was noticed, he would not have got away with that.

While being careful so as not to put too much strength, Urz wiped around her shoulders. When the towel touched her, Elizavetta shook her body in surprise, but she immediately relaxed her shoulders.

“—Urz.”

Suddenly, Elizavetta called him.

“You mustn’t say to anyone that I had a nightmare. Some people already know though.”

Urz hesitated and was not able to answer immediately. Without resting his hands, he opened his mouth after a little thought.

“If you would like, Could you not tell me the reason?”

The towel was now wiping out the curve from her waist to her buttocks. So as not to touch somewhere awkward, he could not continue to look away. Urz wanted to concentrate on the conversation.

“It will make needless worry, won't it? In the first place, saying a person like a Vanadis having a nightmare is a little...”

“A dream is something that anyone has. One may also have a nightmare when he is tired, isn't he?”

Urz said in a soothing tone. He inwardly thought “perhaps...”.

---Is she sweating this much whenever she has a nightmare?

If she put a towel on the table for times like that, then he could understand.

Besides, even this attitude of hers. Although it seemed calm, it was somewhere odd (irregular).

He finished wiping her body. When he said that, the red-haired Vanadis turned only her profile towards him.

“...How about wiping also the front?”

Her voice contained abundantly charm and shyness, but Urz did not have room to notice it. Were Elizavetta's cheeks red because of the dim light or...

As she chuckled, she turned her face away from Urz.

“It's a joke. Thank you very much for your efforts, Urz. I will do the rest myself, so it's all right.”

While being relieved at the words, Urz put the towel beside Elizavetta. He put back the canopy. The youth's heart was still beating intensely.

“Well then, I shall take my leave.”

“I may seem to be persistent, but not a word about this to anyone. Promise?”

What is it?, Urz thought. What would this person mind it?

“Master. If you have some kind of trouble, then...”

“There is not such a thing.”

It's was an immediate reply. But, impatience could be felt in her tone.

Urz decided to withdraw for the time being. He would probably not want to talk about it to anyone. When he bowed towards the canopy and was going to leave the bedroom, he heard Elizavetta's voice.

“—Thank you, Urz. Go immediately.”

It was not a high-handed way of speaking like earlier, it was the voice a girl her age.

“I will rush over anytime.”

Urz left the bedroom. He quietly shut the door.

Within the darkness, there were two shadows.

One was that of a small old man who wrapped his body in a black robe. There was a crystal ball like a child's head in her hand, and it was emitting light. The old man was silently staring at that crystal ball.

While boringly staring at the old man's back, one youth was sitting on the floor and gnawing a gold coin. With a medium build, he was wearing a thick fur with treated fur on the collar and sleeves. He wound a green cloth around his head, and it was hanging down around his shoulders.

It was the basement of a shrine built in the old times. The illumination was only the light of the crystal ball which the old man was holding and the air was heavily stagnated. Dust had thinly piled up on the floor covered all over with stones.

The old man was DrekaVac. And the youth was called Vodyanoy. Either of the names was known as the name of a monster or demon in old legends. In fact, they were not humans.

Suddenly, DrekaVac stirred. Vodyanoy moved only his eyes, too.

In the darkness where there should be nothing, a small fire suddenly appeared. The fire soundlessly popped as it rapidly swelled up and a small-sized old woman appeared while scattering sparks.

Clad in a black robe covering her body entirely, she was dragging a broom of poor structure. From the hood worn over her eyes, only unkempt white hair and a hooked nose barely peeped out.

“Long time no see, Yaga-baasan^[7]. What's the matter? Coming in to such a place.”

As Vodyanoy swallowed the gold coin which he was gnawing, he happily called out to her. The old woman called Yaga snorted in displeasure.

“I have a little request to ask of DrekaVac. Speaking of which, it looks like Torbalan has perished.”

“Yeah. He was killed by the master of the Luminous Flame. The master of the Luminous Flame seemed to have died afterwards though.”

Vodyanoy answered in a tone which contained no traces of regret at all.

Torbalan was their comrade; he had disguised himself as a human and crawled into the Asvarre Kingdom. However, he had been destroyed by the Vanadis Sasha in the Olsina naval battle.

“We lost someone precious. He was a lazy man who liked playing, but he knew courtesy much more than you.”

“Baba Yaga. What do you want from me?”

DrekaVac asked without taking off his eyes from the crystal ball. Baba Yaga made a small nod.

“DrekaVac. Could you lend me one of your dragons? There is a Vanadis I want to meet, you see?”

“Yes. Do you speak of the Vanadis to whom you gave power to long ago?”

As he recalled, Vodyanoy asked from the side.

“Yes, her. It has been two years since we have met. I thought that even one present will be necessary.”

The old woman demon revealed a distorted smile in the interior of her hood.

“Afterwards, I will have you help me look for “the Bow” if it’s fine. I have completely lost track of him since Torbalan made him drop into the sea.”

At Drekvac’s words, Baba Yaga frowned.

“If you look for him and is not able to find him, then I think that he has already died. Well, if I can return the debt immediately, I don’t mind though.”

As soon as she finished saying that, Baba Yaga’s figure disappeared in the darkness. Afterwards, Only Drekvac and Vodyanoy remained in the same way as before she appeared.

Drekavac kept looking into the crystal ball. Vodyanoy was gnawing a gold coin.

Chapter 5 – Baba Yaga

Under the gray sky, snow began to flicker. The sun which has passed its zenith was hidden by the clouds.

“Lord Massas. Let’s rest a little in there.”

Lim who was riding a horse pointed to a building, which seemed to be a temple in a place a little away from the highway with a finger. While advancing a horse next to her, Massas nodded.

“You’re right. We should arrive at the Imperial Palace by tomorrow. We shouldn’t overdo it.”

The old Earl turned an anxious look towards Teita riding on the horse with him.

“Teita, can you bear with it a little more?”

“I am all right. Massas-sama. Limlisha-san.”

Teita raised her face and showed a carefree smile. There was tension in her voice and her hazel pupils were also tinged with vitality, but rotundity was lost from her

puffy cheeks. As expected, she could not hide her fatigue due to the long journey. Even so, she had not complained even once so far.

Several days had passed since Lim and company entered Lebus. The journey so far went fairly well. They had been blessed with the weather, but the fact that they had helpers was also big.

At the time when they left LeitMeritz and entered Legnica, the trio stopped by the Imperial Palace of Legnica and the port town of Lippner. There they received warm hospitality from Lippner's mayor Dmitry, the sailor Matvey and the Imperial Palace's civil officials.

Especially Matvey, who gripped Teita's shoulders and deeply bowed. When Tigre went to Asvarre, he tagged along as a supporter, and they were also riding the same ship for the return. Rather, Lim and company had to console him by turns.

"Teita-dono. Limlisha-dono. And Earl Rodant. I probably have no right to say something like that, but I wish and pray to the gods that your journey goes smoothly. I would also like to tag along with you, but I can't do so."

The scary-looking former sailor said so and saw the trio off. As they received their help, Lim and company were able to pass through Legnica without any problem in particular.

There was no helper in Lebus, but they estimated that they would arrive at the Imperial Palace by tomorrow. Without encountering bandits or wild beasts, the trio was advancing their horses as planned.

The building was a temple as expected. It seemed to be quite old, and cracks ran through and rotted away the roof and walls. Just in case, Massas made Lim and Teita wait outside, drew his sword and went inside. This was because there were many such buildings which were the lair of bandits.

When he confirmed that the inside of the temple was uninhabited, the trio pulled their horses and entered.

“Was it left alone with neither a user nor person managing it?”

As he sat down after properly clearing away the dust piled up on the floor, Massas muttered.

“I heard that there are a few abandoned temples like this in the northern part of Zchted. They say that they were those who enshrined gods of old times or fairies...”

Lim answered while affixing a torch lit with fire to the floor. Massas said while looking at the ceiling.

“Hmm. Well, if we can endure snow and wind for the time being even in a run-down shabby house, I guess there is no problem.”

At that time, Teita who put her baggage away and took off her hat stood up. Her twin tails shook.

“Is it all right if I pray?”

Massas found that there was an old altar in the depths of the shrine.

Born as the daughter of a shrine maiden, Teita regularly visited a temple and kept praying even since she served Tigre as a maid. As they worshipped the same gods as Zchted, she did not intend to miss a prayer even in a rotted temple. In addition, it was natural for her to want to pray for Tigre’s safety.

“It’s dark, so be careful and not fall over.”

Both Massas and Lim understood the girl’s feeling. She nodded without worrying in particular.

Teita quickly bowed her head and ran to the altar.

The altar was certainly old, but the edges were not damaged and cracks were not running on it. On the right and left sides of the altar, lined up were windows with their top parts having the shape of an arch, and a feeble light were shining through them.

When she confirmed that there were carved sculptures of ten bodies of gods at the back of the altar, Teita went down on her knees. She took off her gloves, joined both her hands together and closed her eyes.

“—Oh gods of heaven!”

Performing the right worship procedure which she learned as a shrine maiden, Teita prayed to the carvings of the gods.

“Please, help Tigre-sama. And please. Please... let us meet him.”

She offered prayers for a long time. When she suddenly felt a chill, Teita opened her eyes.

She gasped. Darkness was lurking around her.

Totally different from the darkness in the temple, it was completely jet black.

As she was surprised to the extent that she could not utter her voice, darkness slipped through Teita's overcoat and corroded her. At the same time as the chill pierced through her back, a woman's voice resounded in Teita's consciousness.

『Lend me your help for a little bit.

She could not speak. She could not stand, either. Teita tried neither to run away nor to call Massas and Lim for help, and gathered power in both her hands. She decided to focus her consciousness on her prayer.

However, even that did not continue for long. She greatly staggered and fell down.

『You're a life-saver. It's a body which I went in before

.

That voice could reach only her.



Until Massas and Lim became suspicious of the time; for the prayer was taking too long and came, Teita did not wake up.

We are going back two koku before Teita fell down.

Elizavetta went out for a stroll accompanied only by Urz. Though the sky was gray, it had not snowed yet. The red-haired Vanadis was clad in her purple dress, she had roundly bundled the Thunder Swirl hanging it to her waist, and was riding a horse. Urz also rode on horse with a bow on his shoulder. He did not wear leather armor.

The two people deviated from the highway and rode in the meadow. It could by no means be said that the weather was good, but it was not unusual in this season. They were thankful that there was no wind.

Urz thought at first that Elizavetta was willfully advancing her horse, but seemingly it was somehow wrong. It looked like she had a clear destination.

Before long, Elizavetta stopped her horse near a certain rotted temple.

It was a small temple without a roof. Though made of stones, be it the walls or the floor they were completely worn down at the end of long years.

“Follow me.”

Elizavetta turned her back to Urz and set foot into the rotted temple. She advanced into the inside without showing any signs of being cautious. Urz also followed after her.

In the interior, placed standing alone was a statue, its height reached up to Urz’s waist.

---It’s a statue which gives an unpleasant feeling.

Looking down at the statue, Urz knitted his brows. It was not that it was ugly or that it felt irritating. When looking at it, he felt an indescribable uneasiness.

The Vanadis of Rainbow Eyes said to Urz while staring at the stone statue with a gloomy face.

“This statue, you see, is called Yaga-sama around here.”

“Yaga-sama...?”

“I think that the proper name is Baba Yaga. She comes out of a fairy tale. You might not know... or rather not remember, eh.”

According to Elizavetta’s explanation, Baba Yaga had the appearance of an old woman who had a broom, wrapped her body in a robe and who gave power to those who continued to pray on a moonless evening.

The red-haired Vanadis continued with a voice which lacked vigor.

“The other day, I had a nightmare, right? That was because I dreamt of Yaga-sama.”

---So that’s why she came as she was worried about this...

Urz alternately looked at Elizavetta’s profile and Baba Yaga’s statue. She, at the time when she had the

nightmare, was not normal (her usual self). Besides according to Naum's story, it should have not been only that night.

"Did you have that dream for many days?"

"—It must be my imagination after all."

Not answering Urz's question, Elizavetta abruptly said . In a tone as if persuading herself. She turned a smile to Urz.

"I'm sorry to have talked about something boring. Let's go back already."

Seeing her attitude, Urz noticed his own carelessness. What worried him was that he might rather have made Elizavetta feel anxious about it.

"Please wait, master."

Urz tried to stop her, but when Elizavetta turned her back to the stone statue, she left the temple walking in long strides. But, she stopped there. She suddenly looked at a distant place.

More than ten shadows of knights were heading towards this place.

“What on earth happened?”

Elizavetta looked puzzled. They were knights of Lebus . And they were people working for the Imperial Palace at that. She had no memory of having given an order to dispatch about several horsemen.

---Did some events happen while I was away for a stroll and Naum sent them?

Thinking so seemed to be the most appropriate, but strangely, they were aiming straight for this place. Even though she told no one where she went for today’s stroll.

Urz who came out of the temple also noticed the knights’ shadows and frowned. Elizavetta did not move from her spot and observed the knights’ state.

The distance with the horsemen shrank and Elizavetta knitted her brows. If they have already come so far, they should have seen the figure of their master, and yet their faces did not show respect towards her.

When the knights came until in front of Elizavetta, they surrounded the two people without going down from their horses. They were fifteen of them. Moreover, they did not simply surround them, they also unsheathed their swords.

“You people. What does this mean?”

No longer hiding her anger, Elizavetta demanded an explanation. The knights answered in a voice tinged with heat as they were somewhat drunk.

“Vanadis-sama. We would like you to hand over that man.”

On horseback, the knights threw a violent voice at Elizavetta. Their gazes were sent towards Urz who was behind Elizavetta.

“Just because Vanadis-sama took a liking to a youngster like you with an unknown identity; who doesn't even know his name, don't get carried away. Whether or not you are suitable to be Vanadis-sama's close aide, we shall ascertain it now here.”

“Till when do you intend to hide behind a girl like that ? You coward.”

They unanimously showered jeers onto Urz. Urz, who felt a sense of danger, rather than being angry, was going to part from Elizavetta's side while tightly grasping the bow which he carried on his shoulder.

But, Elizavetta held out her hand before Urz and stopped his movement.

“You stay there.”

Fighting spirit was already shining in her eyes of different colors. She was not only worried about Urz. As a master, she also had to correct her retainers' folly.

In addition, Elizavetta had also noticed that they were strange. Scowling at the knights, the Vanadis of Rainbow Eyes declared.

“If you can't consent, it's also fine. However, get down from your horses first and shouldn't you plead to me? Without even doing so, you crowd together and appeal to power? You should be ashamed as knights of Lebus!”

The knights did not return words. They raised their swords and approached Elizavetta with enough momentum to cut her. Elizavetta grasped the Thunder Swirl.

The black whip which was mowed down from left and right screamed in the atmosphere and knocked down the knights from horseback. She held back, but even so it was a dreadful power.

In addition, when Elizavetta swung her Dragon^{Viralt}ic Tool twice, thrice, there was only one knight remaining on horseback. The red-haired Vanadis let anger flicker in her eyes of different colors and stared at that knight.

“You are the mastermind, eh.”

The man did not answer; he set up his sword and charged while raising a war cry. Elizavetta wielded her whip.

The sword and the whip clashed and scattered a shrill metallic sound in the atmosphere. The man’s sword broke and he fell down from horseback. He was flatly thrown against the ground and his neck was twisted in an unnatural direction.

At the same time, Elizavetta had also bent down due to shock. Urz who was behind watching the situation promptly supported her.

“Are you all right, master...?”

The end of Urz’s words got hoarse. Elizavetta also gasped. The two people’s gazes were not turned towards each other, but towards the knight who just fell from horse. To their surprise, that knight stood up while staggering. With his neck twisted as it is.

“...What is the meaning of this?”

Towards the unspeakable scene that could only be called bizarre, the two people faltered. Moreover, the other knights also stood up one after another. Although she held back, they had received a blow from the Thunder Swirl.

“—You did something cruel, eh young girl.”

Suddenly, a hoarse voice of an old woman could be heard. In the depths of the rotted temple, from within the

darkness. Although it was feeble enough that it seemed to melt and disappear into the wind, for some reason it was clearly whispered close to her ears.

“These persons are those who desire power like you before. To deal with them violently is quite pitiable.”

Elizavetta’s movements stopped. Urz who had already nocked an arrow on his bow shot the arrow to the knight who headed towards him. There was no longer room to hold back, and the arrow pierced the forehead of one knight. But, that knight, not even falling down, kept advancing towards him while shedding blood from his forehead.

“Master. Their target should be me. Please escape!”

To Urz’s desperate appeal, Elizavetta finally pulled herself together. But, she stout heartedly shook her head.

“Don’t say such a stupid thing. Do you ask me, a Vanadis, to abandon a subordinate and run away?”

“This is not the time to say such a thing—”

Before Urz’s words ended, Elizavetta mowed down the Thunder Swirl. The knights who were approaching

were blown away. Then, she led Urz by the hand and went back into the temple.

There was no tree outside the temple. So, in order for a minority (i.e. Urz and her) to take on a majority (i.e., the knights), she could not help but escape indoors. In addition, Elizavetta also needed to find out the identity of the owner of the voice of a little while ago.

When they jumped into the temple, a chilly and somewhat strange atmosphere wrapped the two people.

Urz hardened his body due to the tension. There was not such an atmosphere when they entered this temple a little while ago. Elizavetta, no showing signs of being afraid, walked to the interior.

The black stone statue, in a form not different from a while ago, was enshrined there.

Elizavetta stood before the stone statue, raised the Thunder Swirl and swung it downward.

It looked like she smashed the stone statue into pieces with one blow, but at the moment of the hit, the stone

statue rolled aside by itself and avoided the black whip. The Thunder Swirl shattered the stone floor and remained in the hole it made.

“You did something violent, eh.”

The voice was uttered from the stone statue. From the shade of the stone statue which shook, a broom jumped out little by little. And the hem of a robe extended on the floor. Elizavetta, no longer wielding the Thunder Swirl, poured a cautious gaze onto the stone statue. While Urz also nocked an arrow to his bow, he did not shoot.

The stone statue did not conceal the inauspiciousness which it was containing, but rather showed it off to the two people. There was only the awareness of witnessing something fearful in Urz’s and Elizavetta’s minds.

Before long, the stone statue took the appearance of a small-sized old woman who wrapped her body in a robe. Since she wore an all encompassing hood on her head, only her hand holding a broom was exposed. That hand was nothing but skin and bones, and it was strangely white.

“It’s been a while, young girl. Two years, is it? How do you find the power which I granted you?”

The old woman sneered. Elizavetta was not even able to utter her voice.

--- *This is Baba Yaga...!*

It was the appearance as told in fairy tales, but the strange atmosphere which was released from that small-sized body ringed a bell to Elizavetta. It was similar to that of the demon Torbalan whom she had fought on the ship.

“Unfortunately, it’s far from my wish. I want to give it back though.”

“Hahaha. That can’t be.”

In the back of the hood, the old woman laughed. It was a sticky laughter.

“Two years ago, you stop by here all alone and certainly wish it. That you want power.”

“Yeah. I certainly wish it. At that time, I was weak and powerless.”

At that time, the knights finally caught up. They attacked even Elizavetta without hesitation.

When the red-haired Vanadis ran her gaze at the knights, she wielded her black whip without holding back at all this time. The knights fell down one after another while spouting dark red blood and having the contents of their helmet and armor smashed.

Elizavetta gritted her teeth and strongly stamped the floor. If she went easy on them, they might have got up and come again. Therefore, she thought that it was necessary to strike them with a blow to the extent that it would become impossible for them to move.

But, they were her subordinates.

“You have really done a number on my knights.”

“You’re wrong, young girl. I simply granted the wish of these people. Like I did to you once. It’s a fact that they hate that youth and were jealous of him. Like it’s a fact that you desired power.”

“...Be quiet!”

As she flew into rage, Elizavetta raised the Thunder Swirl. Yaga, even though seeing that, did not flinch, and she poked the floor with the handle of the broom she was holding.

At that moment, the floor covered with stones was divided in two. Elizavetta and Urz lost their footing and fell; only Baba Yaga was floating in the air.

The two screamed and were swallowed in the darkness with the falling stones.

It was two years ago that Elizavetta prayed to "Yaga".

She, at that age, was busy and full of troubles. This was because she had to deal with both a plague which had occurred in a village in a territory under the direct control of the royal family, and the crime which her father had committed.

Elizavetta did not like her father. There was no way she would come to like a father who picked her up on a one-sided convenience despite having abandoned her once.

But, when she heard that Ellen killed her father, she decided to challenge the silver-haired Vanadis in a duel.

She did not think something like “even if he was such a father, he was my father”.

Perhaps, she had wanted her father to acknowledge her one day. Therefore, she could do nothing but vent her anger to Ellen who deprived her of that chance forever.

However, when she challenged Ellen, she was utterly defeated and came to learn her powerlessness.

It was then that she prayed to "Yaga".

She lost and returned to her territory, and as the days, in which she took a walk during pauses of her work with the state affairs, continued, she found a rotted temple. It was only one year since she became Vanadis, but she had never heard that there was such a thing here. Keeping those who accompanied her waiting outside the temple, Elizavetta went in.

Even if it was the nest of bandits, she had a ^{Viralt} Dragonic Tool. Unless it was a powerful enemy like Ellen, she should be able to drive them away with one slash of the Thunder Swirl.

As expected, there was nobody inside. The temple itself was small and there were no traces that it was used in a long time.

In the inner part of the temple, there was a black stone statue.

『Do you want power?

The voice was uttered from the stone statue, and it was directly addressed to Elizavetta's consciousness. To the surprised Elizavetta, the stone statue continued to send what should be called thoughts.

The stone statue introduced itself as "Yaga".

『I appear only before those who seek power. — Do you want power?

"Power...?"

『The power to hold down your enemy.

In her consciousness which had become hazy, Elizavetta nodded.

She wanted to win against Ellen.

She wanted to prove that she was not weak.

According to her attendants, about a quarter koku had passed when Elizavetta came out from the temple.

“What were you doing in such a small temple?”

“I was praying.”

To her worried subordinates, Elizavetta replied with only that.

Elizavetta who returned to the Imperial Palace after her walk ordered an attendant so that a suit of armor was carried into her room. Then, after being left alone, she tested it (power) at once.

With only the power of her right hand, Elizavetta was able to lift the heavy armor. A lump of iron which was probably the weight of an adult. Moreover, she grasped

it by the gauntlet in her right hand. The gauntlet made of iron was easily crushed in her hand.

There was no change whatsoever on Elizavetta's right arm. Her muscles did not swell, and there was no strange pattern carved on it. Although the fingers were a little gnarled from having kept grasping a sword or whip, even so they were thin, the skin was white and they were delicate.

It was not one act of a fairy tale where one got power from a fairy. It was a cruel reality. If one were to learn of this unique power, with what kind of eyes would people look at her?

Unconsciously, her hands were tracing both her eyelids. What had continued to exist from when she was born, the thing that continued to display her peculiarity was there.

Elizavetta decided that she would tell nobody about this power. Fortunately, she was a Vanadis. She should be able to deceive her surroundings with that.

She also decided to use this power only when it would be necessary no matter what.

Then, she came to have nightmares occasionally. That stone statue that was in the depths of the temple tried to urge her to use that power more. To murmur to her to demand more power.

Elizavetta was not able to tell anyone about this. It was because this was what she had learnt from the time when she began to be discrete due to the dreadfulness of having her peculiarity (being her right eye) exposed.

I am the Vanadis Elizavetta Fomina. While persuading herself so, she continued her existence as Vanadis.

When he came to his senses, Urz was lying down in the darkness. Something was bending over on top of him. Something heavy which was soft and warm as such.

---What, is this?

Anyway, Urz moved his hand trying to brush it aside. Then, he touched something softer. Something that carried roundness and was massive, to the extent of being a little excessive in his hand.

When he moved his fingers they were jostled by a mysterious elasticity. At the same time, a faint breath tickled the youth's ears. When he moved his face, a smooth sensation touched his cheek.

His consciousness gradually became clear and his body also conveyed the sensation to his brain. There was a sensation of cold stones which his back conveyed over his clothes. Then, what on earth was on top of him?

As Urz tried to raise his body, it slipped down while leaning on the youth. Urz was now in a position where he supported it with his right hand.

A dim light entered his field of vision, and Urz finally realized the true identity of what was on top of him.

It was Elizavetta.

“M-Master!”

Also because he was surprised, Urz's voice got hoarse. He put his hand around the back of Elizavetta who seemed to have lost consciousness, and supported it as he held her. He brought his ear close to her face, checked her breathing and carefully observed her face and body with eyes which grew accustomed to light, but it seemed that she was not injured.

"What a relief..."

Heaving a sigh of relief, Urz absentmindedly shifted his attention to the light which was illuminating them. It was the Thunder Swirl which Elizavetta grasped. It was tinged with a white light from the middle to the tip of the black whip.

"I see. We have—"

Urz finally remembered. The floor of the temple which was in ruins crumbled and fell.

Even when looking up, darkness lurked on the ceiling, so even the height was not known. The light of the Thunder Swirl did not seem to reach up to there, either.

---*What was that?*

As the figure of the old woman who called herself Yaga floated in his mind, Urz unintentionally shivered. His instinct was telling him that that was not human. Then, what kind of being was that?

---It didn't look at all like a fairy. Maybe a monster or a ghost...

Someone went by precisely such a name long ago.

Urz shook his head and erased the old woman's appearance from within his head. He did not know who she was, but he did not want to meet her ever again. They had to run away from here as quickly as possible.

As he pulled himself together, he patted the floor where he was sitting down with his left hand. There was the sensation of flat stones. There were edges, but they were connected tightly together so that there was no gap. Several large and small stones which rolled over were probably debris from the temple's floor which collapsed.

--- Is there a passage in the basement of the temple?

At that time, a low groan leaked from Elizavetta's mouth. Urz was surprised and called.

“Master!”

As if responding to his voice, the red-haired Vanadis opened her eyes. Her vacant expression recognized Urz’s face and turned into that of perplexity.

“Are you all right? Are you hurt anywhere?”

Elizavetta did not answer immediately. It seemed that she was trying to say something, but words did not come out of her half-open mouth and her face was dyed red. She seemed to have noticed that she was held in Urz’s arms.

“U-Urz. I can properly stand, so let me.”

She was able to spin words somehow, but her voice was unnaturally high. While wondering whether it was all right, Urz softly removed his arm which was put around her back.

As she placed her hand on the floor, Elizavetta raised her body. She did so while staggering, but she stood up. Urz also stood up while being careful about her movements.

When looking at the floor which was illuminated by the Thunder Swirl's light, debris rolled over here and there on a long and narrow passage.

There was also Urz's bow which was mixed among them, but it was broken in two. While being secretly discouraged, Urz did not show it on his face and smiled at Elizavetta.

"Anyway, it's good that above all else that you're not injured."

After saying so, Urz unintentionally looked at his left hand. He realized in what kind of posture Elizavetta had fell on top of him, and noticed at this late hour the real nature of that strange sensation.

"You, too, are you all right? Aren't you injured?"

Not noticing Urz's dismay, Elizavetta looked at the youth with a worried face.

"T-Thank you for your concern. I'm not seriously injured, so."

As he rapidly answered, Urz looked up at the ceiling so as to deceive her. Was it possible for them to be safe after falling from that height?

At that time, Elizavetta noticed that her black whip was tinged with light which was different from usual.

“—Right. You protected us, didn’t you, Valitsaif?”

As she smile and thanked her Dragon^{Viralt}ic Tool, Elizavetta pulled herself together, hung the Thunder Swirl and began to walk.

“Let’s go, Urz.”

“—I didn’t know that there was such a passage in the underground of this temple.”

Changing the Thunder Swirl into a cylinder form, Elizavetta said, illuminating ahead with its light while walking.

She did not know the height of the ceiling, but the walls pile up stones without a gap. As for the width of

the passage, it was wide enough to the extent that at least three adults could walk side by side. The air was cold and dry.

“The fact itself that there is an underground passage in a temple is not rare, but it certainly is not normal.”

Urz answered back. After regaining his composure, the youth was walking beside Elizavetta. He also manifested the intention of protecting her if something was to appear, but more than Urz who only had a piece of rubble the size of a fist, Elizavetta’s was probably far stronger.

“Is that right?”

“It's like a warehouse for storing savings or a place to bury something important...”

To Elizavetta which made a surprised face, Urz explained so. However, he thought that this passage, which they were walking down, belong to neither of these purposes.

---That Yaga person is probably inviting us in.

Or all of this might have been planned from since Elizavetta had nightmares. After all, one should not forget that this place is enemy territory.

---But, nothing happened since then. Is it over after having dropped us?

He did not know Baba Yaga's purpose. If she intended to kill them, she should have been able to do so while they had lost consciousness.

The passage bent to the right several times and then turned to the left, but it did not divide and the straight path continued. He was thankful for only that point.

Thinking of having a positive talk, Urz said in a casual tone.

"I want to quickly get out of such a place."

Urz who was about to continue by saying "if we come out" swallowed his words.

Assuming that they were to get out of here, Elizavetta and Urz would have to bury corpses. The corpses of those who aimed at their lives.

There was no doubt that it would become an uproar.

The problem was that they were the only ones who knew why the knights attacked them. Even if they were to tell the truth, how many people would believe it? They would wonder whether Elizavetta did not think to kill those who were jealous of Urz.

Elizavetta had also probably thought of it. But, she did not fret about it like Urz and proudly stuck out her chest.

“Urz. You don’t have to worry about anything. They tried to kill us. We naturally defended ourselves. That’s all there is to it.”

Her voice was dignified and one could feel an aspiration which did not yield to anyone. Then, she softened her tone to some extent.

“But, I apologize for having involved you. I’m sorry really.”

“You need not. I’m your adviser after all.”

Urz also pulled himself together and bowed with a smile. It wasn’t as if he didn’t think about whether it was

good to have such an attitude in enemy territory, it was the opposite.

Precisely because it was such a situation, it was necessary to have confidence, composure and determination.

While walking down the passage, Urz asked what he had been worried about.

“What is that Yaga person?”

“A Demon, a monster. Something like that, I guess.”

“Why is she after us?”

“I don’t know. But, she doesn’t seem to want to kill us immediately.”

When she talked about Baba Yaga, Elizavetta’s voice was tinged with tension. There was not only the guilty feeling, but also the uneasiness of not knowing if she could win if they fought.

But, not showing her innermost thoughts on her expression, she sweetly smiled at Urz.

“Urz. I will protect you.”

That was her true feelings without any falsehood. And , Elizavetta felt a sense of fulfillment about protecting someone.

The two people wondered how much they would have to walk. They suddenly stopped.

“There is something.”

Elizavetta’s gold eye and blue eye were turned to ahead of the passage towards the depths of the darkness where the Thunder Swirl’s light did not reach.

Beyond this, there was something. Something wearing a dangerous presence as to give one a shiver.

Urz looked at the Thunder Swirl in Elizavetta’s hand with a sidelong glance. With this light, the other party would have probably noticed them.

---It has been a straight path so far...

The youth’s face stiffened with tension. He wanted a weapon.

Not a small piece of rubble which he was grasping now, but a bow and arrow which he was used to.

“Rest at ease, Urz.”

Elizavetta said with a smile.

“I’m here and there is this Valitsaif. There is nothing to fear.”

As if responding to her words, a white spark scattered from the light which the black whip wore.

The red-haired Vanadis set up her Dragon^{Viralt}ic Tool and walked straight. From within the darkness, a ferocious blood thirst sprayed along with a hazy air. Something like a groan could be heard.

“It won’t be strange even if there is something. You must absolutely not get far away from me.”

As they carefully advanced, the walls of both sides were interrupted and the two people went out to a vast space.

“Urz! Close your eyes!”

Elizavetta raised her Dragon^{Viralt}ic Tool while shouting. The white light which the black whip was wearing conspicuously increased its shine. The sound of the air being burnt also reached the ears of Urz who was behind her.

“Slash and brush aside the dark night, ephemeral^{Nott Rubeed} fang”

The red-haired Vanadis swung her Thunder Swirl downwards. From the tip, a strong flash so as to burn the eyes was released along with a roaring sound which shook the atmosphere. While dazzlingly illuminating the space, the flash tore up the darkness exactly like lighting and went forward. It shot something huge which was in the inner part.

“It’s there...”

The voice of Elizavetta who muttered could not conceal her shudder. The trait of the Dragon^{Veda}ic Skill shot now was something which could aim at an opponent in a distant place and which also steal their sight with a tremendous flash; but it had not that much destructive power. It was far inferior compared to Burn and Split^{Gron Lazriga} Heaven and Earth which was another

^{Veda}Dragon Skill. Even so, if the opponent was human, it had the power to mow down at least several people in one go.

Elizavetta was astonished because she learnt the true identity of what was lurking by the instantaneous flash, and because she confirmed the fact that the ^{Veda}Dragon Skill had been almost ineffective against it.

It slowly raised its body and glared at Elizavetta and Urz who was behind her with its four eyes. It released a breath tinged with heat.

“...A dragon?”

Urz muttered as he was amazed. It was indeed that.

Its constitution surely looked like that of a lizard, but its size was in a different league. Its big frame like a small mountain was covered with scales having the color of iron. Its four legs, though short, were fat like a medium pillar of a castle or palace, and one could feel their strengths which supported its large build. The claws which were in the end (of the feet) were sharp.

On his long neck that was divided in two, and there were two heads. In contrast to it, its tail was short.

“A Double ^{Gara Dova} Headed Dragon...”

Though the air was cold, sweat blurred on Elizavetta’s forehead. The Double ^{Gara Dova} Headed Dragon was a brutal dragon assumed to be a deformed kind even among the dragons. There was no room to think about why it was in such a place.

The large animal roared. The atmosphere of the open space screamed, and Urz’s and Elizavetta’s skins shivered.

Stamping its feet on the floor covered with stones without any gaps, the Double ^{Gara Dova} Headed Dragon charged.

“Urz, step back!”

Tightly grasping the Thunder Swirl, Elizavetta shouted. With the Dragonic Skill from a little while ago, ^{Veda} if this space was a small village it would be fully settled,

she broadly understood up to that point. If she were to attract the attention of the Double ^{Gara Dova}Headed Dragon, Urz would not get involved in the fight.

Urz looked up at the Double ^{Gara Dova}Headed Dragon, looked at Elizavetta's back, and then looked down at the rubble (pebble) which he was grasping. Realizing that he would only become a hindrance no matter what the circumstances, the youth parted away from the dragon and the Vanadis with a bitter face. In front of such a big beast, he could not even become a shield.

The Double ^{Gara Dova}Headed Dragon let its eyes fierily shine and headed towards Elizavetta. It was difficult for her that the illumination was only the light that the Thunder Swirl wore. It was difficult to grasp the sense of distance to the opponent. Unless she solved this problem, she could not yet afford to fight.

---A little more...

The Thunder Swirl was a weapon with a considerably long range, but it was also the same for the Double ^{Gara Dova}Headed Dragon. In order to give an effective blow, she also needed to strengthen her resolution to receive an attack.

The Double ^{Gara Dova}Headed Dragon let out its sharps fangs, and moved his two heads at the same time. The Vanadis of Rainbow Eyes avoided these (heads) which made the atmosphere groan and attacked her from left and right by rolling over the floor.

As she got up, Elizavetta swung the Thunder Swirl. She was aiming at the left head, but the Double ^{Gara Dova}Headed Dragon twisted its body and stopped it with the scales of its head. It emitted an unpleasant sound like that of scratching a lump of iron, and a blue spark scattered on the surface of the scales.

The Double ^{Gara Dova}Headed Dragon raised a scream of pain, but Elizavetta knew well that the wound was superficial (shallow). As evidence, even though the dragon's scale was wounded, he was not blown off.

---If I use Burn and Split ^{Gron Lazriga}Heaven and Earth, then...

Among the Dragonic ^{Veda}Skills which Elizavetta uses, it was the one possessing the most destructive power. In that case, even if it was a Double ^{Gara Dova}Headed Dragon, it would probably kill it.

But, it would take time, though little, to use that ^{Veda} Dragonic Skill. About two or three breaths' time. During that time, the Double ^{Gara Dova} Headed Dragon would easily bite off Elizavetta.

--- If I cause him to become cautious here though, making him flinch by inflicting an injury on him...

The Double ^{Gara Dova} Headed Dragon which turned towards her once again approached. Elizavetta set up her ^{Viralt} Dragonic Tool and glared at the dragon.

“—Thunder ^{Melnit} Blade!” The black whip changed into a huge single-edged sword with innumerable, sharp protrusions. The blade which harked back to a somewhat large hatchet was jet black, but each protrusion was coated with lightning which scattered sparks one by one. It was heavier than the Iron Whip and was also lacking in durability, but it had enough destructive power.

The Double ^{Gara Dova} Headed Dragon raised its two heads, and quickly moved the right one. Elizavetta, not even trying to avoid, scooped up her ^{Viralt} Dragonic Tool from below to above.

An impact as to make one's weapon fall was transmitted to Elizavetta's arm through the ^{Viralt}Dragon^{Gara Dova}ic Tool. That was also the proof that she smashed the dragon's jaw. The Double Headed Dragon's right head screamed and bent backward. The tip of nose to the jaw was blown off, and pieces of meat and dark red blood were scattered.

However, Elizavetta could not get any closer to the big beast. This was because the dragon which writhed in agony vigorously thrust out its left foot.



The thick claws which would probably blow away half of one's body, even if it only grazed mowed down the atmosphere. While dodging by promptly bending her body, Elizavetta struck her Iron Whip at these claws.

There was a response; one of the claws was blown off. However, it did not seem to be that much painful for the Double Headed ^{Gara Dova} Dragon, not showing signs of faltering, the beast swung its foreleg. Elizavetta rolled again on the ground.

Offense and defense continued.

While carefully measuring the timing, Elizavetta swung the Thunder Swirl sometimes in the Iron Whip's form, and sometimes she turned it back into the form of a simple whip. She could not expect it to be that much effective, but she immediately drove in the ^{Veda} Dragonic Skill which she could release. However, it was, as expected, difficult to deal a fatal blow while avoiding the Double Headed ^{Gara Dova} Dragon's fangs and claws.

The Double Headed ^{Gara Dova} Dragon attacked Elizavetta with its remaining head and its two forefeet. As it was in a fit of anger that one of its heads was crushed, it did not pay

heed to the fact that its fangs, claws or scales were wounded, and its movements showed no signs of growing dull.

Elizavetta had reached the point where she began to breathe heavily. Depending on the fact that she kept taking a precise timing within the darkness, the mental exhaustion would become intense. This was because if she mistaken the timing even once, she was almost sure to die.

Several red hairs clung on her forehead and several lines of sweat streamed down from her face. Even so, so as to seize a chance of victory for an instant, Elizavetta was staring at the Double ^{Gara Dova}Headed Dragon.

The Double ^{Gara Dova}Headed Dragon's left head attacked her for the tenth time. Elizavetta raised the Thunder Swirl and met the enemy.

For a moment, the Double ^{Gara Dova}Headed Dragon quickly drew back its head. Not stopping only with that, it greatly twisted its big frame covered with scales.

“You...!”

While realizing that she was lured, Elizavetta struck the Thunder Swirl to the wall of scales which approached at a tremendous speed.

An intense shock attacked Elizavetta's whole body, and the Double ^{Gara Dova}Headed Dragon's scream and the young girl's shout echoed at the ceiling. The Vanadis' body danced in the air and she was flung against the floor from the back. It seemed that she was cut in her mouth and felt the taste of blood at the tip of her tongue.

Feigning an attack with its head, the Double ^{Gara Dova}Headed Dragon set a body blow to the flank. Elizavetta who realized that she could not dodge it could only reduce the power of the body blow by launching a strong blow from the Thunder Swirl. Barely, she resulted in only being blown off.

Elizavetta eagerly raised her body. Her breath was rough. She felt pain and numbness on her whole body, but thankfully, she was still clearly conscious. Ahead of her gaze, the Double ^{Gara Dova}Headed Dragon was twisting its body. The mouth of its left head had been greatly splitted vertically.

---I must somehow approach and use a Dragonic Skill... ^{Veda}

She stood up. As the chest of her dress was greatly torn, Elizavetta noticed then. That blood also streamed from her right arm. She tried to walk, and staggered.

“Master!”

She understood that Urz was rushing over.

I told you to step back, didn't I?

As she tried to say that, Elizavetta did not speak.

The Double ^{Gara Dova}Headed Dragon was approaching from the side. Urz did not even try to look there. He was only staring at the red-haired Vanadis, at his important master .

With a force as to bump into each other's body, he tightly held Elizavetta who stood stock still. They rolled over the floor too. Immediately after, the Double ^{Gara Dova}Headed Dragon's jaw blew the space where she was standing.

Urz cursed and threw the rubble which he grasping at it. It struck the Double ^{Gara Dova}Headed Dragon's foreleg and fell on the floor; in the next instant, it was stepped on and broken by that leg.

As Urz gritted his teeth, he separated from Elizavetta. He stood in the way so as to protect her from the big beast.

“What do you intend to do...!? Step aside, Urz!”

Elizavetta shouted in a sorrowful voice. However, Urz did not step aside.

“Please adjust your breath, Master!”

With his back still turned on his master, Urz shouted while glaring at the Double ^{Gara Dova}Headed Dragon which looked his way. Sweat floated on his whole body. His knees trembled to the extent that it looked like he would fall. But, he did not intend to run away.

“I can gain the time of at least one or two breaths.”

“Do you ask me to sacrifice you?”

Behind Urz, Elizavetta tried to stand up, but she had no strength on her feet. As he tightly grasped his fists, Urz returned the shout.

“I have no weapon. But, Master has. How to defeat that thing and what should be done. Please understand!”

As if it was cautious of Urz who suddenly jumped in, the Double ^{Gara Dova}Headed Dragon was heading towards him with slow steps.

“I want a weapon”, Urz thought. In order to gain time even a little for Elizavetta. There was no lie in these feelings. But, if he had a weapon, if he had power, he could have played a better hand.

The Double ^{Gara Dova}Headed Dragon took a powerful step forward. The vibrations were also transmitted to Urz and Elizavetta through the floor. To that menace, Urz tried to endure.

---A bow is... no. What is necessary is power.

『—Do you want power?

That voice resounded in his head quite abruptly. As if responding to the scream of his heart.

As he was surprised at the sudden thing and was dumbfounded, he heard that voice once more.

『—Do you want it?

It seemed to be the voice of a young girl. It was not that of Elizavetta. It was a mysterious voice which contained a vicious fascination.

The Double ^{Gara Dova}Headed Dragon was approaching. Urz closed his eyes and answered that voice.

---I want it.

He was conscious that he was doing something laughable. This was because the Double ^{Gara Dova}Headed Dragon was approaching just before his eyes. Since there were only Elizavetta, this big beast and him in this place, it could be said to be an auditory hallucination.

However, Urz sincerely responded. To him who did not have anything, there was no other hand. He did not intend to move from here, either. So, he kept that mysterious voice company.

A chuckle tickled Urz's consciousness. Similarly with the mysterious voice, he did not hear it with his ears. It seemed to either whisper in the youth's head or talk directly to his soul.

『—I made it in time, eh.

In his left hand which he was grasping, Urz felt a strong heat.

He opened his eyes in surprise and lifted his left hand.

Something which could be described as a lump of darkness was wrapping his left hand. While burning Urz's left hand, it wriggled as if it was alive, extending into something long and narrow, taking on a certain form.

“...A bow?”

『You should thank that child.

The owner of the voice which suddenly sprang in his head disappeared to these last words. However, Urz was not concerned that much by that. The darkness on his left hand had molded a bow up to even its bowstring before the youth's eyes. A bow with a long and narrow curve.

---*Why?*

At this unbelievable occurrence, Urz stared at the jet black bow. Be it the strange voice or this bow, what he could not understand was what had happened to his own body. It was to extent that he thought that the Double ^{Gara Dova}Headed Dragon which was approaching was much more realistic.

However, Urz had accepted without trying to reject it. As if he knew about it for a long time. Even when looking at the black bow, he did not feel an ounce of fear.

---*An arrow...*

Urz knew how to use it. Or did he recall it?

“Master. I will borrow it for only a little while.”

Urz stood in a way where half of his body turned towards the Double ^{Gara Dova}Headed Dragon. He strongly and firmly planted both his feet on the floor of stones. While sticking out his left hand which held the bow straight and taking aim at the dragon, Urz pulled the jet black bowstring with his right hand.

The Thunder Swirl of Elizavetta who was looking at Urz in blank amazement emitted a pale light. While flicking many white sparks in the atmosphere, countless particles of light rose soundlessly. The light drew a curve which harked back to lightning, and was poured into Urz's right hand.

The light which gathered in the youth's right hand shaped an arrow. An arrow made of lightning from the head to the shaft feather.

The bowstring trembled. The moment when the arrow was fired, the space was wrapped in a dazzling flash. A thunder as to mistaken that the floor was crushed roared, and the arrow of light approached the dragon with a movement and speed harking back to lightning while extending countless branches.

The dragon might have possibly sensed danger. But even if that was the case, it was too late.

In the next instant the dragon's jaw flew, everything above from its head was blown off to pieces. Not even able to raise its voice, the Double Headed ^{Gara Dova} Dragon died instantly. The arrow of lightning blew off the ^{Gara Dova} Double Headed Dragon's big frame too, and disappeared there as if having used up all its strength.

After a short pause, the darkness returned. The bow of darkness which arose in Urz's left hand soundlessly disappeared, too. On his left hand's palm and his right hand's fingers, only traces of burns remained. Urz was staring at his own hands with an absentminded face.



“I’m...”

In Urz’s mind, the face of a chestnut-haired girl flashed . And then, that of man with the same hair color as him, a firm body and a calm appearance. An old man with a gray beard standing next to him. And a small-sized old man which was always at his side.

They were standing on a ground where greenery extended. There was a mountain in a distant place, there was a forest, and there were also a river and lake.

“Al...sace?”

Next was a silver-haired girl. A girl who tied her golden hair to the left side of her head. A baldhead knight with graceful features. Many other faces floated in Urz’s mind, and then disappeared.

---That’s right. I’m not Urz. Urz is my father’s name and...

“...Urz?”

Elizavetta who noticed the youth’s unusual phenomenon called out to him with an anxious face. She did not understand at all what happened, too. However,

she understood only the fact that this youth had saved her. And for now, as long as she understood that, that was enough.

However, Urz did not answer Elizavetta's voice. The things which were floating in his head a little while ago made the youth confused.

Elizavetta who stood up promptly supported Urz who staggered.

"Urz. Hang in there—"

The red-haired Vanadis interrupted her words there. She lighted fighting spirit in her eyes of different colors, gathered power in her hand and grasped again her Thunder Swirl. This was because she felt a strange presence in the air.

"—Good grief. I lose a precious
Gara Dova
 Double Headed Dragon. I will have to apologize to
 Dreka^{vac}."

At one corner in the darkness, an old woman wearing a robe and holding a broom appeared. It was Baba Yaga. In the interior of the hood, put over her eyes, her eyes which shone white were turned towards Urz.

“But, it’s a harvest. Hey “Bow”. I will have you come with me.”

As she rotated the broom, Baba Yaga pointed its tip at Urz. At the same time, Elizavetta raised the Thunder Swirl. The black whip which tore up the air divided into nine parts from the tip of the handle. Each part was wrapped in a white lightning.

Even though surprised at Urz’s unusual phenomenon, she adjusted her breathing and gathered power.

Baba Yaga’s goggling eyes moved and turned towards Elizavetta. A scornful laughter floated on her wrinkled face.

Elizavetta’s beautiful face warped. An acute pain as if being stabbed with countless needles ran through her right arm. The Vanadis’ movement stopped and an anguished breathing was spitted from her mouth.

“It’s the price for the power.”

As she said over her shoulders, the old woman demon not further concerned about Elizavetta and looked at Urz who stood up absentmindedly.

The space around the youth swerved. Like when Baba Yaga suddenly appeared.

“Well then—”

It was when the demon tried to tell a parting remark. Elizavetta moved. Her whole face covered with sweat, she raised her right hand which was in pain, and couldn't move even a finger.

“—Burn and ^{Gron Lazriga} Split Heaven and Earth!”

Nine bolts of lightning raised a groan and attacked Baba Yaga one by one with the intent of destroying her. The old woman who had let her guard down was completely caught off guard.

An impact and a roaring sound pressed the space and light which crushed everything dyed the surroundings in white. The old woman's jet black robe was torn off and a scream similar to that of chicken gushed out from the demon's mouth.

“You, bastard...”

The next moment, Baba Yaga and Urz's figures disappeared from that place.

Inside where the afterglow melted, only Elizavetta was left in that place.

“...Urz?”

Running her eyes of different colors left and right, Elizavetta called Urz's name.

However, nobody answered.

“Urz! Urz...!”

Elizavetta lost her composure and called Urz's name many times in the darkness. Like a very young lost child who strayed from his parents.

It was a half koku after losing sight of Urz that Elizavetta came out to the surface.

She found the exit at once. The thin passage expanded in the inner part of the space, and ahead there were long

flight of stairs which continued to the surface. The time it actually took was a little less than a quarter koku.

The remaining time of about a quarter koku, she had been sitting down in blank amazement. Tightly grasping the Thunder Swirl, she was assailed by a shock to the extent that she was not worried about the pain running throughout her body. It didn't matter if she was a Vanadis, if something like this happened successively, she would as expected get confused and become unable to move.

It was because she remembered the back figure of Urz who tried to protect her that she stood up.

“What to do and what should be done, huh...”

While muttering these words, Elizavetta finished going up the stairs.

The exit was nearly one Belsta (about 1 Km) away from that temple. Except the fact that the forest spread out nearby, there was a meadow which did not stand out. That temple could be seen standing alone from far away.

Even though it should have not yet been noon when they arrived at the temple, the sky had darkened.

The figure of Elizavetta who silently walked towards the shrine looked just like that of a ghost coming out of a fairy tale. Her red hair was disheveled, her skin got slightly dirty and was wounded and her dress was also torn in several places. Only her two eyes of different color were tinged with passion and were shining.

While walking, plans in the future were set up in Elizavetta's head.

Not only had she to bury those knights, but she also had to search for Urz.

Before returning to the Imperial Palace, she would head for the nearby village. She wondered whether her horse was safe. In case it was not, she would have to borrow a horse.

---Please be safe, Urz. I will save you this time.

Putting strength into her feet which seemed to lose strength, Elizavetta was walking as she strengthened her footsteps by treading step by step.

It was when the day had grown dark that Teita regained her consciousness.

After discovering the figure of the chestnut-haired maid who had collapsed in front of the altar, Lim and Massas put an overcoat and a blanket on the floor, laid Teita on top of it, and they watched over her by turns.

Also due to the fact that her breathing was not rough, she was not moved from the temple; but Massas thought that it seemed to have been a good idea.

“Um, I caused you trouble, Massas-sama, Limlisha-san.”

Teita who woke up raised her body and quickly bowed her head to the two people. Massas with a smile all over his face and Lim who also smiled respectively shook their heads.

“Please don’t worry. Is your body already all right?”

“Yes. I’m already fine.”

With a smile, Teita tried to stand up, but since she staggered, the two people hurriedly supported her.

“We decided to pass the night in this temple today, so rest slowly. We will arrive in the Imperial Palace tomorrow. Then, we will get a room in a hotel at the castle town and we will be able to sleep on beds.”

While laying Teita down, Massas shook his gray beard and cheered her up.

“It was a long journey, but hold just a little more.”

Lim said so, too. Both of them were thinking that Teita collapsed because of the fatigue of the long journey. Since she didn't have a fever in particular and there was not anything abnormal with her body, they could not think otherwise.

In a lying position, Teita looked up respectively at Lim and Massas who were sitting left and right.

She clearly remembered that darkness which surrounded her body in the midst of her prayer. Moreover, she had an idea of what it was.

--- *Tir Na Fa...*

The Goddess of night, darkness and death which was one pillar of the ten gods. She was a mysterious god who was at the same time the wife, the elder sister and the younger sister of Perkūnas, King of gods.

About one year ago, Teita had apparently encountered the existence called Tir Na Fa. When Tigre threw himself in Brune's civil war, Teita desperately followed him, too.

A certain time, Tigre rode a horse fast along the meadow as if being led by something, and the youth also let Teita, who was worried about him, ride his horse.

And, Tir Na Fa's temple suddenly appeared behind the two people.

In the temple, Teita was possessed by something.

Teita held the same sensation like that time when she was surrounded by darkness in front of the altar. The strange sensation that something entered her.

But, Teita decided to keep silent about it to both Massas and Lim. Teita herself did not understand well.

Even if she talked about it, she would only make the two people worry excessively.

Therefore, she decided to speak about a bright topic. Teita said to the two people with a smile.

“Speaking of which, I had a dream. A dream about Tigre-sama.”

“Ohou”, Massas rode on the talk.

“What kind of dream was that?”

“Tigre-sama was confronting a dragon which had two heads with a jet black bow. He was protecting a woman behind him. It was a little scary, but as expected it was the usual Tigre-sama... he was cool and happy...”

Teita thought that that was not a dream. Anything and everything was too fresh for a dream.

“A dragon, huh. Well, there was also something like that in the last civil war after all.”

Massas laughed while gently patting Teita’s head. Lim was watching them with a smile.

Outside of the temple, the sky gradually darkened.

To the cold sensation of the ground, Urz woke up.

He quickly jumped out to his feet and held out his arms. But, there was no bow to grasp and his hand only grasped the empty space in vain.

“This place is...?”

He raised his face and looked around. What were noticeable were only lonely trees which let leaves fall, and a gray sky could be seen from the gap of branches extending as if stretching around. The sun had considerably slanted.

---Inside a forest somewhere...? No, more importantly.

Noticing that Elizavetta was not there, Urz’s face turned pale.

“Master! Where did you go?”

Heading among the trees, he called out in a loud voice. But, his voice only resounded fruitlessly and there was no response. As he got tired and stopped shouting, silence fell over the land.

“What the hell is going on...?”

Urz sighed. He could not believe what had happened to his body.

He was attacked by knights who should have been his comrades, and he was made to drop in the underground of a temple by the power of a suspicious old woman. As he encountered a dragon and defeated it with a strange power that even he did not understand well, this time he found himself in a strange forest. It was like a nightmare and there was no sense of reality at all.

As he looked at his left hand, there were some scars similar to burns.

The woman’s voice who resounded in his head. And, a bow built up by condensing darkness.

An arrow which was made by pulling out power from that whip of Elizavetta.

He used it as if it was a matter of course. He knew how to use it.

He felt a dull pain inside his head, and a certain scene floated in his mind at the same time.

He, who set up a black bow, was in there. Standing beside him was the silver-haired Vanadis holding a long sword.

“...Ellen?”

He unintentionally spoke of her nickname. Urz frowned after muttering.

It was Eleanora, so the nickname was Ellen. I see. Why did he know it? Why was he able to speak it easily as if he was used to calling her by that nickname?

---It's obvious. There is no way I would forget.

Thinking so, Urz blinked several times. Why was there no way that he would forget?

With a headache, a voice resounded in the corner of his consciousness. Something which was sleeping was starting to wake up.

Teita. His late father Urz. Batran. Lord Massas. He had heard about it.

“Al...sace?”

Where did he hear it? It was obvious. It was the place where he should return.

“A place to return...?”

As he violently shook his head as to shake off the headache, Urz turned towards the trees with hollow eyes

.

“That’s right. I have to return to the Imperial Palace... Master should have also surely returned to the Imperial Palace.”

The cold wind of winter got through between the trees and blew against Urz. While curling his body, the youth began to walk while tottering. His body was heavy as if he caught a cold and he had a headache. A dull pain ran in his head whenever the scene of something flashed, he was reminded of a name which he had heard somewhere

.

He tripped and fell over the root of a tree. When he raised his body while groaning in pain, Urz, startled, raised his face. Several footsteps and voices could be heard from the other side of the trees

He thought to hide behind a tree, but his body did not move like he wanted. He was apparently found while doing it slowly. Footsteps and voices were heading his way.

There were four men. Three of them wore leather armor which was slightly dirty and they hung a sword on their waists; only one wore a chain mail, a hand axe was hung to his waist and he was holding a wide sword in his hand. The four men were indeed dressed like bandits. From how they looked at Urz, they did not seem to be travelers.

Urz looked up at the men with an absentminded face. The men looked at each other.

“A dying person by the roadside, huh. What do we do ? Should we drag him to the town and sell him out?”

“Does this look like we can sell it out? Let’s kill him and deprive him of all his possessions.”

“If we kill him, should we begin by cutting his head? After all, I didn’t do such a thing recently.”

One looked down at Tigre with a sad expression, and revealed a sadistic smile. However, the man who wore the chain mail rebuked them with an amazed face.

“What will you do if a beast comes near due to the smell of blood?”

As he advanced ahead, the man pointed the point of his wide sword at Urz.

“Do you have money?”

Urz did not answer. He could not answer. The man looked down at the youth with indifferent eyes and continued.

“All right, die. I will take even your clothes and shoes.”

At that moment, Urz promptly threw down his body horizontally and rolled over the floor. The sword that the man thrust out straight pierced the empty space.

For Urz, it was a desperate action, but it had only irritated the men. Faster than the youth could raise his body, the man kicked Urz flying. To the youth who unintentionally crouched, the man raised his sword as he wanted to kill him this time for sure.

It was at that time that an arrow cut the wind and came flying. Letting a muffled sound echo, a dark red arrow head pierced from the back of the man's head to his forehead. Not really understanding what happened to him, the man fell on his back in the posture where he had his sword still raised.

“W-Who is it? What did you do?”

The remaining three men looked back at the direction where the arrow came flying with faces wrapped in surprise. Not even showing a behavior to hide, footsteps were approaching.

It was a one young man who showed his figure. His age was about the same as Urz's. He was an impressive man whom one could understand at first glance that he was a Muozinel person from his dark brown skin. He wore a thick overcoat and he wrapped an orange cloth around his head. He hung a curved sword on his waist

and he had tied many small bags to his belt. He was holding a bow in his left hand.

“—You guys, are thieves or bandits, right?”

The gaze of the Muozinel young man surveyed the men and he said in a tone as if assuming it. He spoke the Zchted language with a really bad accent.

The bandits did not answer; they warped their faces in anger and respectively unsheathed their swords. They attacked the young man from three sides so as to surround him.

The young man did not move from his spot. He calmly measured the distance to the enemies who approached; he vigorously thrust out the bow held in his left hand and with its point, gouged one eye of the man who was approaching from the left side. At the same time, he pulled out the sword from his waist and brandished it. The head of the bandit who attacked from the front flew leaving a trail of blood.

The bandit who lost one eye held his face and crouched on the spot; and the other lost his head and fell while dyeing the ground dark red.

The remaining one, because of too much shock, kept standing on the spot. And, it only gave time to the Muozinel young man to regain his stance.

His throat cut down, the third man also fell while spouting blood. The young man, not even turning his eyes there, looked down at the bandit who was crouched with cold eyes and thrust his sword without hesitation.

While raising his body, Urz was staring at the one who killed bandits in utter amazement. Those were movements without any opening and without mercy.

The Muozinel person looked his way. Wrapped in a bloody atmosphere, the two people looked at each other.

“Are you one of their comrades?”

Thrusting his sword covered with blood before him, the Muozinel person asked. Urz stared wide-eyed and fervently shook his head. The Muozinel person observed Urz with his sword still thrust before, but he lowered the sword before long.

“Well, it’s obvious. You don’t have any weapon and don’t wear armor, either.”

As he said so, he crouched down on the spot, cut the clothes of the corpses and began to wipe the blood on his sword with them. He looked at Urz, who did not move as he was still perplexed, and said.

“Don’t just stand there, you scavenge too.”

“...Me, too?”

“Even if I feed the corpses to the wolves and crows, money will be useless for them.”

Urz stared at the young man with an amazed face. He finally understood. This young man did not save him; he only attacked the bandits whom he was unlikely to have problem with even if he stole their money. At any rate, be it the bow or the sword, he possessed a splendid ability.

Urz was absentmindedly staring at the corpses of the bandits, but when he breathed out one sigh, he endured the headache and the cold which still continued and approached the corpses.

---Whatever, he saved me after all.

Besides, Urz himself needed tools in order to make food and light a fire. This was because he did not know where this place was and he had no weapon, either. It was not an act with that much pleasant a feeling, but he searched on the chest of the corpse.

To the sky at which he suddenly looked up, the signs of night had crept in.

When they held tools necessary for travel starting with dried meat, bread, a flask, several pieces of copper and silver coins and then a tinderbox which they wrapped in a cloth, Urz and the young man left that place.

They left the bandits' corpses as it is. So that the smell of blood might lure out the beasts, there was no composure to bury them.

“Are you a person in a nearby village?”

Being asked by the Muozinel person, Urz cocked his head in puzzlement.

“I don't really know. When I had come to it, I was lying here.”

He answered honestly, but the young man frowned and struck Urz with an impudent gaze.

“What’s that? Did you meet a kidnapper or something?”

“Something like that, I guess...”

Urz answered while tilting his head to the side. If he were to say that he happened to meet a demon and a dragon, would this young man believe him? Then, Urz noticed that he did not even know his name.

“Speaking of which, I haven't thanked you yet. I’m Urz. Thank you for having saved me.”

“It’s a bit early to say that I saved you. I’m Damad.”

Saying so, the young man who called himself Damad revealed a sarcastic smile.

The bonfire was burning. What was grilled in the flames was the rabbit that Damad killed.

The day had already grown dark and the forest was wrapped in the night darkness. The air was cold, but there was at least one comfort, the trees were blocking the wind.

“You’re unexpectedly dexterous.”

Fixedly staring at his bow, Damad said as he felt admiration while pulling the bowstring. Urz had offered that he wanted to maintain it and tried to fix the bowstring.

“I’m a little confident when it comes to the bow.”

Urz answered with a smile. The headache and chill continued, but they had softened to the extent that it was bearable.

While striving so as not to show the pain on his face, Urz said with a serious face.

“I’m working for the Imperial Palace of Lebus. I wanted to return, but do you know the place?”

To Urz’s words, Damad turned a suspicious look.

“By Imperial Palace, you mean the place where a Vanadis is, right? Can someone as stupid as you work (there)?”

Though he thought that it was a cruel remark, Urz did not feel that much discomfort. It was because he thought that this young man’s attitude was probably frank.

“Just for note, I’m serving as a servant of Vanadis-sama.”

Because that seemed to rather deepen Damad’s doubt, he kept silent about apprentice knight and adviser. As Damad snorted, he nodded with a tiresome expression.

“How much do you pay?”

“How about 50 pieces of silver coins?”

“100 pieces.”

Composed, Damad suggested the double amount. Urz nodded while wryly smiling.

“Understood. I will prepare it when we arrive safely.”

“If you lie, don’t think you’ll get away with this. The Imperial Palace should be at least ten days March from here. Assuming we will depart when the day dawned, we will arrive in the evening.”

Urz stared wide-eyed in surprise. He did not know where he would be taken, but it seemed to be in a place a little far away from that temple.

Damad cut the roasted meat of rabbit into a proper size with a dagger. He thrust it into a tree branch and gave it to Urz. While thanking him and receiving it, Urz asked something he was worried about.

“By the way, who are you?”

“I’m a merchant of Muozinel. More precisely an apprentice merchant. I came to this country for training.”

“Training in a foreign country?”

“It’s something common in my home country. If you say that you work for the Imperial Palace, then haven’t you happened to meet Muozinel merchants in the castle town?”

“Indeed”, Urz consented. So, he had visited the far-off edge.

It was a lie. Damad had never intended to become a merchant in his whole life.

He was the subordinate of the Muozinel King's younger brother, Kreshu Shaheen Baramir. He was not in a position which could be called a close aide, but his face and name were known by Kreshu who was setting eyes on him. Though young, he was genuine warrior, and a general of one army.

There was a reason why such a person was in Lebus. He was ordered by his master Kreshu to confirm Tigrevurmud Vorn's death.

Kreshu was secretly planning to invade Brune. At that time, the situation would greatly change with the fact of whether or not Tigre was alive. Tigre's death was one of the important factors that Kreshu wanted be certain of before beginning the war.

Damad who received that order crept in Zchted pretending to be a merchant. He first headed to Legnica,

and investigated in detail about the story that Tigre had fallen into the sea. Afterwards, he wanted information from a different angle and visited Lebus.

It was half on a whim that he saved Urz; as for the other half, it was to kill time. In Lebus, as he did not obtain at all information about Tigre and didn't even hear about another story which could attract his interest, Damad was fed up.

Besides, it was a walking distance of ten days until the Imperial Palace, so it did not seem to take time even if he helped him. In that case, he wondered whether it was a show of hand to win his favor.

“However, you have a poor language. I wonder from which countryside you come.”

As Damad said without reservation while biting the rabbit's meat, Urz answered back, too.

“About the language, isn't it the same for you?”

“I'm a Muozinel person, so it's fine if I'm somewhat sucked at the Zchted language.”

“If you say that, it seems that I’m also a Brune person after all.”

“What is that? ‘It seems?’ You said”

To Damad’s face which seemed to be suspicious, Urz spoke about the fact that he had a memory loss. The Muozinel young man became more and more suspicious and made a steep look.

“Haven’t you been saying random things for a while now?”

“If I were saying nonsense, I wouldn’t have said that I’m working under Master... Vanadis-sama. I was living in the castle town of Lebus, that's probably more believable right?”

“Well, I also intended to go to the Imperial Palace after all. Damn, I should have asked for 150 pieces of silver coins.”

Damad, who cursed, looked at Urz with a face as he thought of something.

“That’s right. If you’re from Brune, do you know someone called Tigrevurmud Vorn? Even if you don’t have memory, don’t you know anything?”

“Tigrevurmud Vorn... you said?”

Because of too much surprise, Urz bent himself forward.

“Maybe, no, surely, it’s me.”

“...Huh?”

After of a silence of nearly ten seconds, Damad stared wide-eyed and stared at Urz. Urz braced up and desperately span his words.

“I said it, right? That I have a memory loss. There is a possibility that I, before losing my memory, was that Tigrevurmud Vorn.”

When he himself said it, it could be thought that there was no doubt. The land named Alsace. The maid named Teita. Batran who protected him and lost his life. And Massas who looked after him.

Urz should be his father's name.

The moment he used that jet black bow, a lot of information had overflowed in Urz's head as if breaking a dam and gushing forth. All of this was appealing to the fact that he was Tigrevurmud Vorn. There was still some ambiguous place like it could be another person's memories though.

“If it's fine with you, won't you tell me? About the Tigrevurmud that you know—”

Urz's lines were interrupted there. A silver blade glittered in the edge of his field of vision. Damad suddenly unsheathed his sword and pointed it at Urz. On the Muozinel person's eyes, doubt and murderous intent surfaced, and Urz was dumbfounded at the sudden situation and could not move.

Only the sound of bonfire quietly resounded.

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tourmaline>
2. ↑ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kvass>
3. ↑ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukha>
4. ↑ unrivaled sphere of activity
5. ↑ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balalaika>
6. ↑ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gusli>
7. ↑ means grandmother, but old woman in this context